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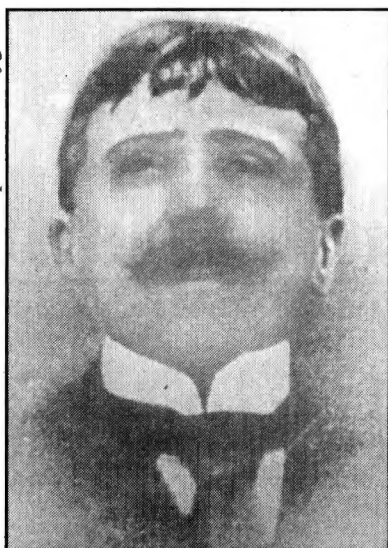


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Marcel Proust, Illiers-Combray, France, 1921

*"Just as those who practice the  
same profession  
recognize each other  
instinctively, so do those  
who practice the same vice."*

— Marcel Proust

## BRUTARIAN NO. 46

Spring 2006

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## interviews

**Elvira: The Queen of Halloween.** ..... 2  
by Michael McCarty

**Kills: Year Zero.** ..... 8  
by Gene Gregorits

**Nobody's Sweethearts** ..... 21  
by Dom Salemi

**The Detroit Cobras  
Got Us Covered** ..... 27  
by Dom Salemi

**An Interview With  
Jacqueline Carey** ..... 31  
by Jayme Lynn Blaschke

## column

**Mr. Bad Vibes' Neighborhood.** .... 37  
by Gene Gregorits

**The Inner Swine Guide To  
Ignorance** ..... 41  
by Jeff Somers

## short stories

**Sometimes They Talk Back** ..... 44  
by Gerard Houarner  
Illustration credit - Mike Bohatch

**The Amazing Martin Landawer** ... 49  
by Jeff Somers

**Direct Line** ..... 54  
by Ramsey Campbell

## reviews

**Music Reviews.** ..... 62

**Zine Reviews** ..... 71

**Book Reviews** ..... 78

**Movie Reviews.** ..... 86

# ELVIRA - THE QUEEN OF HALLOWEEN



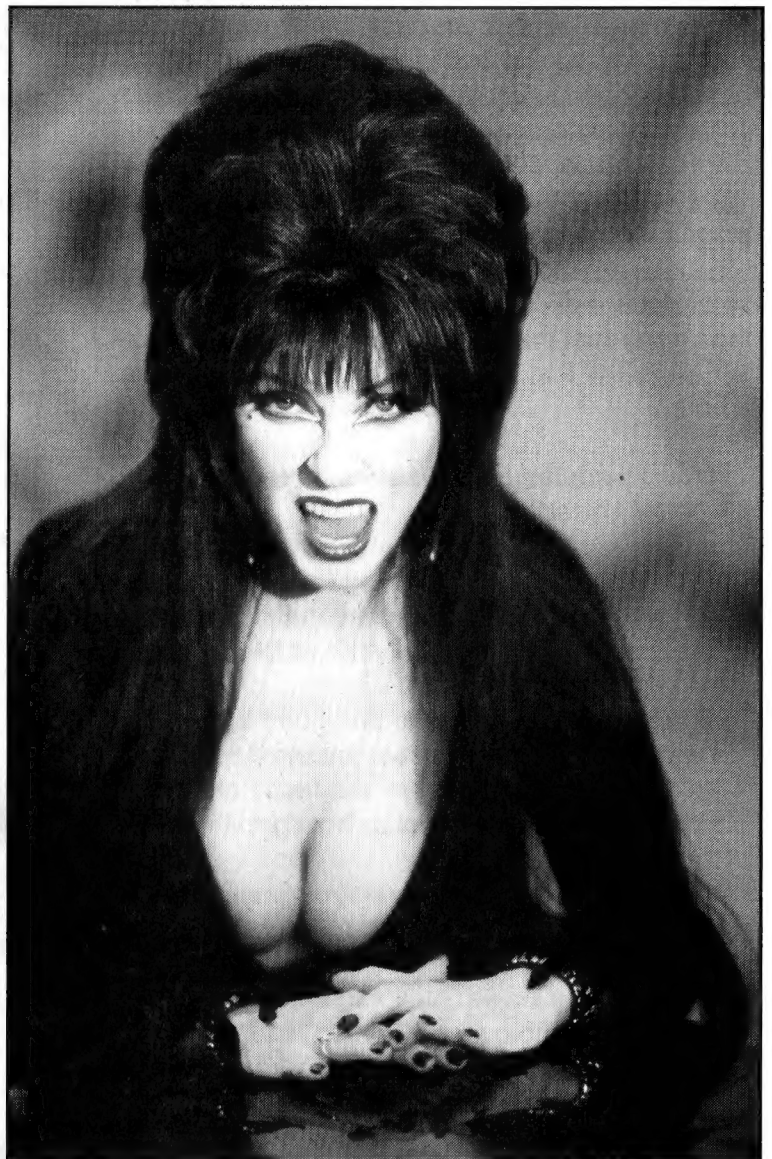
Interview  
with  
Cassandra  
Peterson

By Michael McCarty



# "I'M THE GAL WHO PUT BOO BACK INTO BOOB TUBE"

- Elvira from  
"Elvira, Mistress Of Darkness."



Movie critic Roger Ebert once described Elvira as a "cross between Mae West and Vampirella," that might explain why for over two decades she has been horror comedy's funniest and sexist actress.

Elvira is the voluptuous vampire-like persona of actress Cassandra Peterson. Elvira was created in 1981 after Peterson landed a job with KHJ-TV in Los Angeles as hostess for the station's horror movie program, "Movie Macabre." On May 23, 1982, she hosted a screening of "The Mad Magician," a 3-D film. More than 2.7 million pair of 3-D glasses were distributed, and Elvira became the first person to appear on television in 3-D.

Peterson grew up in Colorado Springs, Colorado, but she "busted out" (a bad pun, I know) and began her career in show business as a showgirl in Las Vegas.

In 1985, she received the Count Dracula Society Award from the Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror Films. In 1986, Marvel Comics began to publish "Elvira's House of Mystery" which ran for 11 issues. In 1986, the Elvira costume became the best selling costume of the year. In 1987, she made her first appearance in commercials for Coors Beer, becoming the first female celebrity hired to endorse a beer product.

She starred in two feature films, "Elvira, Mistress Of Darkness" (1988) and "Elvira's Haunted Hills" (2002).

Elvira is everywhere – on t-shirts, posters, pinball machines, slot machines, computer games, and much more.

To find out more about Elvira and Cassandra Peterson go to [www.elvira.com](http://www.elvira.com)

**BRUTARIAN** - *Is it comfortable or uncomfortable to wear such a low-cut bustier? How long does it take for you to change into the Elvira costume?*

**ELVIRA** - I have it timed to exactly an hour and a half, and that is rushing like crazy. It is uncomfortable to wear for a long time. All the things that men like about women dressing up sexy are uncomfortable – tight clothing, push-ups (bras) don't really feel that great, six-inch heels and the hair and all of that. It gets really old after a couple of hours.

**BRUT** - *You dated both Elvis & Jimi Hendrix. Who is a better kisser?*

**ELVIRA** - I was so busy thinking I was with Elvis when I was with him I couldn't even think. I don't even remember kissing. It was like, "Oh my God I'm kissing Elvis."

Jimi Hendrix was pretty damn good too.

I was so overcome with something (laughs) -  
- I don't know what (laughs) – the fact that I was kissing them, I don't remember how great it was.

**BRUT** - *As Elvira, why did you never do any truly revealing photos shoots for publications like "Playboy." You did work as a showgirl before?*

**ELVIRA** - I did photos for "Playboy" as myself, when I was a showgirl in Vegas and I did revealing photos, but I've never done them as Elvira. That was mostly because, back then I was young, making money, model topless – no big deal. It was me and every single other actress in the entire world – ever (laughs) -- has done that to pay the bills. Being a showgirl, it was not a big deal, for me. I did several "Playboy" magazines issues, I did "Oui Magazine," a few others.

I was asked to do "Playboy" as Elvira and I turned them down. I know Hef very well.

**BRUT** - *Was there a particular reason that you turned them down? Did you think "Playboy" would be too risqué for the Elvira character? Or wasn't she suited for "Playboy."*

**ELVIRA** - I think she was suited for "Playboy" (laughs). Number one, not only adults like Elvira. Although Elvira is not aimed at children, kids really love the character. I do a lot of merchandising, which crosses over to kids. Like Elvira candy, Elvira video games, Elvira pinball games, lots of

things that kids really enjoy. So I had the feeling if Elvira did photos, it would take away the kid appeal. Number two, I polled fans of mine at a convention and asked them if "Elvira should pose for 'Playboy'." And I asked my fans and they said, they thought it would take away too much mystique from the character. What is sexy and mysterious about the character is, that you never get to see too much. If you see everything then what else is new? Now she is like everybody else.



**BRUT** - *Just like -- Pamela Anderson.*

**ELVIRA** - (Laughs) There you go.

"Playboy" was offering me a huge amount of money, that was the only part that bummed me out.

**BRUT** - *Why do you think humor and horror go so well together?*

**ELVIRA** - I think they work so well together -- when



something funny happens in a horror film you let your guard down. Then you can zap them with something scary. It is something so out of left field that you really get a good scare. You make a film like a roller coast ride – getting them to laugh, getting them to relax, laughing a little bit, it's that funny, then laugh – then BOO! You scare the crap out of them. Because if they are tense the whole time, they are waiting for the scare and it's just not as good. Humor and horror play off each other well.



In my case, being silly and funny all the time -- I find that people who enjoy horror have a great sense of humor too.

**BRUT** - How did the character of Elvira get started? And why do you think she is so popular after two decades?

**ELVIRA** - The character got started as a horror host

in L.A., hosting late night bad horror movies here in Hollywood. After a few years, we were able to syndicate the show, so it went nationally. First of all, I was the first horror host to go completely national. The reason she is so popular is because she became very synonymous with Halloween. I do so many things during the Halloween season – Elvira has become the queen of Halloween, an icon for the holiday. She basically became what Santa Claus is for Christmas.

**BRUT** - But without the red suit?

**ELVIRA** - Yes - (Laughs) - without the red suit.

**BRUT** - You've met Vincent Price before, what was he like?

**ELVIRA** - He was fantastic, I loved him. I adored him long before I was Elvira. He was my favorite star when I was a child. Meeting him was really a thrill. He was just one of the nicest, kindest, funniest men I've ever met in my life. Every time I saw him, I told him that he missed his calling, he should have been a stand-up comedian. He was just one of the funniest guys alive and I don't think many people knew that about him.

He was also a really well rounded individual – not just an actor. He was a chef, he collected art, and he was a brilliant guy!

**BRUT** - Because you are such a big fan of Vincent Price, is that the reason you did "Elvira's Haunted Hills" movie?

**ELVIRA** – Absolutely! I'm a fan of not only Vincent Price, but also the whole A.I.P. genre of film. When I was a kid, my favorite films were those series of films that Roger Corman did that were loosely based on Edgar Allan Poe stories. Like "The Pit And The Pendulum," and "The Fall Of The House Of Usher." Those were my absolute favorite childhood movies. I tried to make a movie that was a parody of those movies and also homage to those movies. Those movies aren't around anymore – I have a very special place in my heart for those films.

**BRUT** - New World Pictures, the distributor for "Elvira, Mistress Of Darkness" went out of business soon after its release. Did going broke hurt the movie? Could have it been a bigger film if this hadn't happened?

**ELVIRA** – It hurt it horribly, it was one of the worst things that happened in my entire career (sighs). My movie had so much pull behind it, so much leading up to it, then the distributors, New World, went bankrupt the day my movie was released.

**BRUT** – *Oh my God! That's horrible.*

**ELVIRA** – I can't remember the exact number, it was going to be released in 30,000 theaters in America. And boom! That day, it was released in 300. It was cut from 30,000 theaters down to 300 theaters. I don't care if you're "Star Wars," you cannot be a hit movie in 300 theaters, there is no way. You can't get that many people in 300 theaters.

It was released in the major markets only – New York, Chicago, San Francisco, LA. In the cities it was released in, it did really well - in New York it was number two, in LA it was number one and San Francisco it was number one. It was competing with major profile films like "Gorillas In The Mist." It was weird, weird – a really bad thing that happened. The movie would have been so much bigger and more famous and more popular had it been released in 30,000 theaters -- any movie would be.

When I tell people about this, it always sounds like sour grapes, but it was true, that's what had happened. I'm not sure my career really ever recovered from it.

The video "Elvira, Mistress Of Darkness" went on to become one of the Top 60 selling videos of all time. That was when videos were selling for \$24.99. It is still in the Top 60 video sales for any video ever – that says something about it.

**BRUT** - *You were in "Pee Wee's Big Adventure." What was it like working with director Tim Burton?*

**ELVIRA** – At the time, when I was trying to do my movie, "Elvira, Mistress Of Darkness" and Pee Wee (Paul Reubens) was trying to do his – we were fighting over Tim Burton.

I saw Tim Burton's movies and all he had done at the time was a short film called "Frankenweenie" and a little animated film called "Vincent" about Vincent Price.

I saw those movies and said, "Oh my God,

he'd be perfect." At the same time, Pee Wee was looking for a director for "Pee Wee's Big Adventure." He ended up getting him somehow. I'm not sure of what it was, the money offer, the deal, whatever it was. He snatched Tim Burton up first, we were too late moving on it. Pee Wee got him and I didn't. Another little thorn in my side.

**BRUT** - *How did you end up on the cover of Tom Wait's "Small Changes" CD?*

**ELVIRA** - You are not going to believe

this, but that is not me. I even say, "Oh my God, that looks so much like me." I wish it was me, but it's not. I never did that, it is so strange.

**BRUT** - *Not many people know you are an author too. You co-wrote "Transylvania 90210" and "Camp Vamp" and "The Boy Who Cried Werewolf" with John Paragon (who also co-written Elvira's movies "Elvira, Mistress Of Darkness" and "Haunted Hills.") Tell us about those books. Any other books in the works?*

**ELVIRA** – No it was just those three . It was a





young adult series of books that came out. When R.L. Stein's "Goosebumps" were really popular. John and I thought we'd do our own version – a little sexier, a little more adult like – they are pretty tame, they are for young adults. We did only three, unfortunately. We'd like to continue but the market was pretty much saturated with horror novelettes at the time.

I later wrote another book called "Bad Dog Andy." It was as myself and with my writing partner John Paragon. It was a parody of the "Good Dog Carl," they are children books about a Rottweiler. We did a parody about John's dog who was a Dalmation.

I have written a few books. I certainly intend to some day write my own autobiography – if I ever get time to do it. That is something I really want to work on.

**BRUT** - *A couple of years ago, you released Elvira's "Box Of Horror." Is there another DVD set in the works?*

**ELVIRA** – No -- but I just made another deal which will be out next year, with a company called The Shell Factory, it is for all my original "Movie Macabre," the original ones in a box set. That is going to be really cool, that stuff hasn't been around for twenty-five years.

I've been watching it recently, I pulled it out of storage and there is some damn funny stuff in there. It's all the old movies I hosted back in the '80s and they are going to be re-released in a box set.

**BRUT** - *Which of your career achievements do you consider your greatest?*

**ELVIRA** – Certainly making the movies "Elvira, Mistress Of Darkness," and "Elvira's Haunted Hills." The first movie I made one was through the studio, it had a bigger budget. The second movie, my ex-husband and I basically made – produced and wrote – did the entire thing. It is quite an achievement to make your own movie. It takes years of your life. We financed it with our own money – big mistake.

To be in the Rose Parade in my own float – the largest parade in the world. And there was the time I rang the bell at the stock market, the closing of the New York stock market.

I have my own pinball machine and of course the beer commercials. Pinball machines and beer, to me, beats winning the Academy Awards (laughs).

**BRUT** - *Do you think there will be a third Elvira film?*

**ELVIRA** - I'm actually having meetings right now about another Elvira film. It may be animated. I think an animated Elvira would be so cool.

**BRUT** – *How did you get involved with animal rights?*

**ELVIRA** – Dan Mathews with PETA, all the suffering involved in factory farming, fur coats, raising animals for fur. I had no idea, I must have been wandering around in some kind naive dream before I met him. He told me about the realities of all that. I couldn't help it, to become involved. Once you hear, explains it to you, shows you the pictures – you become so floored. If you ever had a pet before in your life, you know that you have to do something to help the plight of animals. Animals are the voiceless – someone has to speak up for them. PETA got me involved initially. I have a special place in my heart for them, I love them.

**BRUT** - *Is there a project you passed on now you regretted that you didn't do?*

**ELVIRA** – Brandon Tartikoff, the late President of NBC, begged me to do an Elvira sitcom. I kept saying "No." I kept turning it down and turning it down. Because I wanted to do a film first. I was adamant about it. Finally Brandon Tartikoff and the people of NBC were the people who funded my first film "Elvira, Mistress Of Darkness."

I've regretted not going with Brandon's first suggestion, doing a sitcom on TV.

**BRUT** – *It probably would have been huge.*

**ELVIRA** - I know it would have been. Since then, I did a foray into Elvira Sitcom, that was for CBS, it was an incredibly funny pilot that never went.

**BRUT** - *Last words?*

**ELVIRA** - Be sure to go to [elvira.com](http://elvira.com) and check out everything I am up to and unpleasant dreams.

# KILLS: YEAR ZERO

By Gene Gregorits



*Transcripts from the Kills documentary film: "I HATE THE WAY YOU LOVE":*

MAJESTIC BAR, 2 April 2005. I stomp in like a deranged beggar, high on expectation and fear, thinking that my mission is gain the respect of my favorite band: THE KILLS. For the last hour, I've been getting thrown from one street to another by brutal winter winds, through the streets of Detroit, ultimate squalor, structural damage, fractured thoughts about tactics and methods, resigned to thinking schizoid mission statements like this: "I must crack their code." Heinous.

*Once in a while, you've gotta burn your lips to keep your feelings alive*

*Once in a while, you've gotta burn down your house to keep your dreaming alive.*

That lyric in particular is a sparkling example of why I've come to be so smitten with the Kills over the last few years, since their debut album *Keep On Your Mean Side* finally convinced me that there is a future for rock music after all. The Kills were what I sought in 1992, publishing *No Future: the Sid*



Vicious Fanzine.

I went to pieces in front of them. I threw as many cans of beer as I could carry down on their table, where they waited patiently for me, and promptly dropped my tape recorder from the pocket of my oversized leather coat, a designer label, the kind worn by professional Gotham muckrakers. I went beet red when I realized that my equipment had detached itself from my person: it did shatter. But luck was with me, the guts of the machine remained intact, and the voices of the Kills (Jamie Hince and Alison Mosshart) took to the cassette tape with great clarity.

I've been saying since 2002 that the Kills are the most important thing happening in music right now. Maybe even beyond music, they have weight and like to throw that weight around. Growling, seething, screaming, sobbing: pallid fiends in the grip of psychosis, in the wee hours, in the moment of truth, in the dark, Jamie and Alison... locked in like two dirty secrets. They shot to fame in 2003, after their daring and brutal first tour which was self-financed on a credit card. The buzz was huge, and led to another tour with loudmouth ne'er do wells Primal Scream.

\*\*\*

*This ain't no wow now. They all been put down  
Who aint dead yet, fled to die closer to the shore. This  
ain't no wow no more.*

I've been feeling what they're saying since I was old enough to have wet dreams. And oe'er the wastelands I cruised, on Greyhound buses, in the thought, in xerox and ballpoint ink, searching for light, life, hard knocked little creeps with nothing to lose, free enough to say the right words, the smart words, the words that were meant to kill. Free agents, subterraneans, the right vibes, the bad vibes.

So here I am on 2 April 2005, with the Kills, Jamie and Alison. My saviors! My Romeo and Juliet of True Bad Vibes. When you agree with someone, full total, it's best to stick to the game of devil's advocate, if you want the deeper truths. I utilized what energies

were left, in search of objectivity. That approach quickly disintegrated. Fuck objectivity. Objectivity is a lie.

And so...talk about GRATITUDE / EUPHORIA / RELIEF! "What took you so fucking long?" I screamed at them. Perhaps they considered fleeing the bar. "The NEW galvanizing force, the answer, the cure!" The poor dears had only just woken up on their tour bus, which was parked outside the club.

Starting with pure essence, a general sense of TRUTH FELT IN THE MARROW, take it where you find it and if that where ain't NOW then so what- all that matters is the future. Year Zero, another writer observed of the Kills' emotional and philosophical location...that's where they live.

Too CLASSIC for words, like a couple of traumatized punks, disused trailer park sweethearts, the rare kind, the most dangerous kind, who've had ENOUGH and know what to do about it: lock and load, stay free, stay wired, keep shooting, keep moving.

Jamie and Alison, AKA Hotel and VV, are in fact quite kind, shy actually...in the flesh, you would notice a tenderness exhibited openly in only a handful of their songs. Both extremes are sincere and authentic. They are sexy, nasty, and uncompromisingly innocent. Blacker than ravens, and whiter than swans. The Kills are a profoundly full bodied experience, and they are as concerned with NOW as any of their outlaw antecedents. They are the sex symbols of a new generation that unfortunately hasn't found its dick yet.

Hard-boiled bard Steve Wynn wrote in a spectacularly creepy song about a guy who'd had ENOUGH: "The guns are loaded and there's gas in the car...play the anthem one more time." That anthem, NOW, is the ruthless work called No Wow, by the Kills. Play it now, play it loud, play it all night long.

Jamie is British, and Alison grew up in Florida. They live together now, in London.

**Brutarian:** You two are pure trouble. And this headlong dive into bad vibes, pure nightmare Americana that you've taken...it's bothered me a little bit. Because I've been waiting for it, for a long time. I just didn't expect anyone to come out and DO what you're doing. And it's been a long time coming, right? But I think that beyond all that you've got true revolution in mind. What's the general reaction been to your hyper-aggressive attitude?

**Jamie Hince:** It's kind of split. There's definitely people that think...we're saving their world in some way. But there's also people that hate it. That's funny in music. You explore things that are weird and dark, you're considered to be underground. But those things have always been celebrated in film and literature. Film and literature are much more successful at exploring those themes. I dunno, it's almost expected in mainstream cinema, to explore beauty vs. ugliness, and love vs. tragedy. In music, it's very restricted, I think.

**Brutarian:** I'm more focused on film and literature, not out of any lack of love for music, but I have to say that I am a little let down by it. And I've been waiting, since I was a kid for another Never Mind the Bollocks, because that record, you know that just made my whole world start to happen. I'm always looking for something that measures up to that standard of ferocity. You delivered that to me and I really, really appreciate it. But that's not a question. I have some though. Uh... oh yeah, Primal Scream, they really got to me as well. With their record XTRMNTR.

**Alison Mosshart:** That's a great record.

**Brutarian:** You toured with Primal Scream. What did you guys talk about?

**JH:** Well, we took a lot of drugs. Bobby Gillespie is really intense. Especially with music, he's an absolute obsessive. I find that really exhilarating, finding somebody like that. Rock'n'roll is a weird thing- or rock music, or whatever you wanna call it. I hate all those terms. But there's this paradox, because on one hand it's like life and death, to the people involved in it, it is life and death. Literally. It killed Sid Vicious, and it killed Kurt Cobain, and like, a lot of people. So that's how it is. On the other hand, it's totally absurd, and ridiculous. It's weird being in that paradox. You can't talk in life and death terms, you can't talk the life and death conversations that you want to talk about with people, because everybody taps into the fact that it's really just this ridiculous thing, in the context of the world. But then, you've got a guy like Bobby-

**AM:** -yeah! He's...

**JH:** -and with him you can totally open up! We had a fistfight, about the Doors. Because I don't like the Doors.

**Brutarian:** You and Gillespie?

**JH:** Bobby, yeah. He strangled me. Because I said the Doors sucked, and it was fake, and it was bullshit. And he couldn't stand it! And I love that!

**AM:** (laughing) No, he was really gonna kill you over it!

**JH:** It's not just, "What do you think of that band?" "Awesome!" "What do you think of this band?" "They SUCK." That's the level of conversation you have, about music, with most people.

**Brutarian:** Yeah, yeah.

**JH:** So he tried to kick me to death and strangle me, about the Doors. I like that.

**Brutarian:** But you've got so much more of a reason. The Kills have a philosophy. I mean, "No Wow" is meant to say that things have reached a terrible deadness now, right?

**JH:** There's some good music around but it's...

**Brutarian:** And that title, it's a criticism...

**AM:** What it means is...it's asking for more. It's asking for a scene, and a time, and a community of people having creative chaos again. Something that is uncontainable. So yeah, it is a criticism, but it's not a focused one. We are not saying, "There's no good bands or good art being made." The way people accept the confines of it all, the way records are released and promoted. There's too many lines drawn, and all these little boxes to put these things in. We've grown up thinking about legends, and being inspired by legends, but not by factual history. Just seeing things being really chaotic, just creating all the time and making a mess. That's exciting. That's what we wanted, and that's what "No Wow" came from. Because everything has become contrived and controlled.

**JH:** Talking about the Pistols and stuff, I think that time, and also the Velvet Underground, all those scenes...the legend of those scenes is what really inspires us. They seem to have been full of artistic anarchy. Bands weren't about just making records, doing a tour and touring the record, then making another record. Real creativity can't be tied down



like that. You can't read about the Velvet Underground or Warhol or Ginsberg, that whole scene without getting frustrated. Same with the punk movement. Kids from council houses writing poetry and fanzines! All this art and creativity just flying everywhere. I think that record companies have learned to absorb that in a really dull way, and channel it into poster campaigns and promo videos, album artwork. I think that's what's missing, is the chaos.

**AM:** People have accepted those outlets. They've accepted them and they're not pushing for anything. They're really dull, and there's nothing creative about those outlets. They're bogged down with rules. It's a very difficult thing, especially being a band. Because they will only look at your band and focus on that. I think it's great to focus on music, but I think it means a lot more than that. It's got so much more in it.

**JH:** I wanted to ask you about Rockets Redglare, that stuff in your interview about Nancy being murdered in a snuff film, is that true?

**Brutarian:** I didn't know Rockets that well. I ended up falling in love with Lydia and moving out to California. (laughs) And then he died.

I'm sure if I'd stayed in New York, a lot of that stuff would have come out. Because I really grilled him about it all the time. I really think that he just liked to freak people out, and that he was cashing in somehow on his past as a friend of Sid's.

**JH:** I love that interview, it's so word-for-word. Like when he says, "See that woman over there? She used to be so fucking beautiful. Fucking

**Brutarian:** Thanks. I'm one of the only people who can say that Rockets actually bought me a drink. The bartenders at his favorite bar got mad at me for asking them questions about Rockets after he died. They had bad memories of him, he was a pain in their ass. Oh, and I was watching this film the other day, Sin City, with Michael Madsen wearing glasses, about 30 pounds overweight. That's when I realized that Michael Madsen

would play a great Rockets. Anyway, here's a good question. You've made iconoclasts of yourselves with the visual mythology, the photos, and the many dark inferences on this new record. And well, with you being a couple and everything... the intimacy of-

**JH / AM:** We are not a couple!

**Brutarian:** WHAT!?

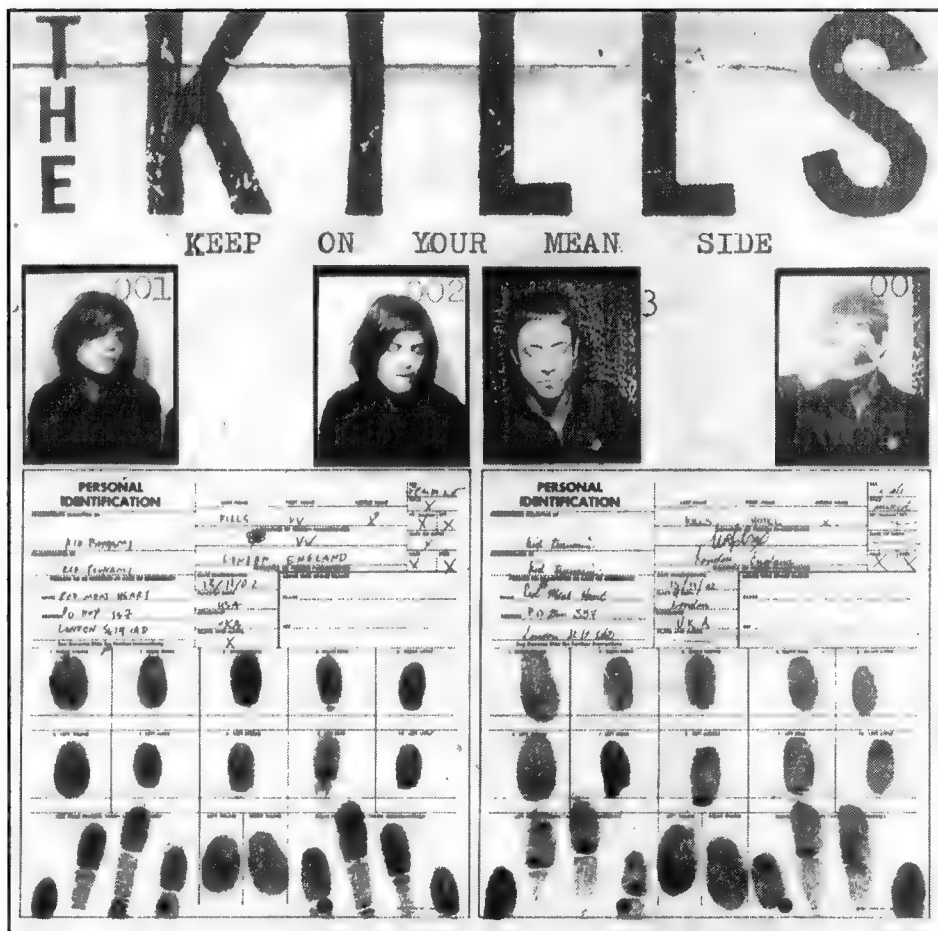
**JH / AM:** (laughing)

**Brutarian:** Well either way, you

have declared war on the zeitgeist, and...did I pronoun- zeitgeist?

**JH:** Zeitgeist.

**Brutarian:** But you don't come across as being brazen or egotistical in the interviews I've read with you. So does the Kills ever seem like something you have to do, that's been thrown in your lap, this great



women, time kicks their asses!"

**Brutarian:** He had like five girlfriends, all of them beautiful, like models. But he was morbidly obese and had tons of health problems. He had this kind of teddy-bear quality that women liked I guess.

**JH:** Well I love that interview, really. It's pretty amazing.

thing that has been left unfulfilled by the others?

**JH:** Kind of. When we met, we were both so disillusioned with the bands that we'd been in. We were living sort of parallel lives, four thousand miles away. We were both doing art and music and film every day. We had identical bedrooms full of books and movies for no one to watch or listen to. In a way, we felt like social outcasts, in our little group of friends. We were the weird ones, staying up all night and doing all this stupid stuff.

**Brutarian:** Like what stupid stuff?

**AM:** Recording things, and writing tons. Making little short films in your room.

**JH:** Writing songs that were not for a band. Making music that was not for anyone to listen to. Doing stuff for our own fulfillment. It did seem like a very natural thing, that we were gonna make our lives into a band, rather than just have a band in our lives. When we met, it just seemed like the natural thing. It never felt like a pact or anything.

**Brutarian:** Do you feel ripped off, in general?

**JH:** I feel this real urgency. Music has become a fucking treadmill, where you can just fuck about and make money. It's a pretty good job opportunity now, to be in a band. It's just a really weird thing that that ever happened. I've definitely missed out on something. And this thing of urgency...well, if things don't change, we're not even gonna have a half-decent chapter written about the time we were living in, let alone a book, to have it documented like all those other scenes. We're just gonna be left with some STUPID

fucking comic book.

**AM:** (laughs) Yes!

**JH:** I felt very urgent about that, that if things didn't change, all this time would be wasted on something that was just a stupid moneymaking thing.

**Brutarian:** But everyone else will tell you that everything is happening! New York is happening, LA is happening...what is it about you two specifically, that separates you from the pack who doesn't see these problems as being so huge?

**AM:** It just instinctual. It comes from that way you just feel when you wake up in the morning. I don't know where it came from, I don't know how that happened, but I know that's why we met. I know that's why we work together. Because we finally found that other person who doesn't piss us off in that way. We just do exactly what we wanna do. We don't ever try and stop each other.

**JH:** You just have that instinct or you don't. Whether you're a writer or a painter, or a museum or whatever, there's some sense of what you do. And you wanna leave your mark in some way. The whole thing's like a big fucking suicide note, in a way. Just wanting to leave your mark. It goes back to that thing of life and death versus just being ridiculous and absurd. I've always been tapped into wanting to leave my mark. So now...I guess you start getting really repetitive with it. These things that all inspire me though, these scenes and artists and musicians, are long gone! I don't see any of that around me anymore! I don't see people making their lives into works of art, and wanting to leave their mark.

**Brutarian:** The commonality you

have...I read something about you both having this love for the book Edie about Edie Sedgwick.

**AM:** That's a great book.

**Brutarian:** I haven't read it. But what was that first encounter like? Did it all come out right away? Where were you in your respective lives that made that happen in the way that it happened? Because Alison, you were in the band Discount, and Jamie, you were in Scarfo.

**JH:** No, my band had broken up. I was in my bedroom doing my studio project thing.

**Brutarian:** Had you given up on the idea of a band?

**JH:** No, I hadn't. I don't know, I was in a bad place, really. I felt pretty hopeless about everything. I was really low, I was taking antidepressants so I-

**Brutarian:** -hey, does that stuff work?

**JH:** In a way! They got me through the night. But it makes you-

**AM:** -still.

**Brutarian:** Have you tried them?

**AM:** No. But everything I've heard about them, sounds like they make you like this [makes weird face]. Still, you know? Gazey.

**JH:** It makes you able to deal with things better. I was on \_\_\_\_\_. And what I liked about it was, every now and again I'd get a dry throat, my heart would start pounding, and my groin would go dizzy. Like I was on Ecstasy. Every now and again, I would get a wave of that. Which was the upside.



**Brutarian:** Ooooh! For me, I got all the bad side effects.

**JH:** The downside was...someone could come in and be like, "You've won the lottery." And you'd say, "Cool." Or they'd say, "Your family has burned to death," and you'd be like, "Shit." There was no sense of-

**Brutarian:** I got lockjaw!

**JH / AM:** (laughing)

**Brutarian:** Yeah, I got lockjaw when I took that stuff. And vertigo, too. I'd just be walking down the street going [pulls horse-face] "HUH-ERRRRRRRRRR." That was horrible! I got the worst side effects you could ever have!

**JH:** It just made me think that I preferred the...well, the dynamic of bi-polar, to be really honest.

**Brutarian:** I prefer non-medicated bi-polar as well. It's more fun that way. You have to learn how to turn your pitfalls into-

**JH:** -into somersaults.

**Brutarian:** Yeah, yeah! I guess that's what fiction can afford me, I can make it up. In Detroit, there is an attitude that you are obnoxious and uncool, that you're going to be ostracized if you communicate any sentiment of things being not good enough in music or whatever. Particularly in music. That could be most places for all I know. I think it is. Have you encountered a backlash, people who hit you with, "Who the fuck do you think you are, to say that there isn't any wow, now?" You know, that kind of thing?

**AM:** We do have that. People telling us, "You know, you really are just

stuck up." And pretentious, and stuff like that. There's not that much though. I think that people that hate you don't really tell you very much. But we do get the odd letter, once a month...where it's just ranting, like, "How DARE you." That's good. I welcome that. I like the extreme of that. We really want people to love us or to hate us. We don't really want anything in the middle. Because the middle doesn't do anything. The middle just keeps everything the way it is. If you can have a really good argument with someone, then that's fantastic. Or if you can agree on it, that's fantastic. So...yeah, we do get

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The reason we haven't named the drum machine is because it's actually a whole bunch of different drum machines that actually just get recorded onto this eight-track thing.

—*Jamie Hince*

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that. We get that a lot where we're from. I think where you're from is always the hardest on you.

**JH:** I've been extremely successful for years, at living in a bubble. Since I was a kid, I learnt right early on, to stay away from the kids that beat me up, and didn't like me. And I'm still doing that now, to a degree. We created a bubble around the band. We've got our idea about what we want to achieve, and I'm not really super-interested in the antithesis of that, it bores me, so I stay away from it. I don't encounter it that much on a direct level. People tend to keep away from us. I know who they are...and they know who I am. I just hide.

**Brutarian:** Yeah, well...you're really up against it. It's like the title of your first record, which is one of the best album titles since Never Mind

the Bollocks. I just love that title, Keep On Your Mean Side. That says fucking everything. If the mean side was represented more often, there might be more bands, well, uh...for me right now, just me speaking about my own passions, in rock'n'roll, there's just you and Primal Scream. Maybe I'm missing out on a few, maybe you could educate me...tip me off, maybe I'm closed minded. Now, the drum machine...because you don't have a drummer, you have a drum machine. And it is used, on the new record, as a torture device, and-

**AM:** (laughing)

**Brutarian:** And it gets me all WORKED UP. That LITTLE BASTARD! It is an obnoxious little demon...the drum machine, and...I was wondering, he's become such a character, have you NAMED him?

**AM:** We love him! And we should, we've talked about it...

**JH:** The reason we haven't named the drum machine is because it's actually a whole bunch of different drum machines that actually just get recorded onto this eight-track thing. I mess around with all sorts of different ones, and they're all really cheap, and shit. I'm lazy when it comes to programming. I hear things, where people do these incredible drum machine things...and those things take at least five hours to do!

**AM:** (laughing)

**JH:** And if I've got an idea about something, and then five hours later I've got the drum pattern for it, I've completely lost interest in doing it. The other things are really simple. It's lucky that I like all that Cabaret

Voltaire and Suicide, stuff like that... because they were just using really simple things. So I just equate it with something I like.

**AM:** It's a metronome. We write a lot to metronomes, because you have more imagination that way. There's less going on, and you think of things easier.

**Brutarian:** That's what I like about you guys. You're more literary.

**AM:** (laughing)

**Brutarian:** And you make room for literature in your music! And you make room for cinematic imagery! So I was going to ask you what your favorite movies are, but...it's not the right time for that yet. I think that...if you're gonna name the drum machine? You should call him Little Bastard.

**AM:** (laughing)

**JH:** (laughing) Little Bastard. That's the name! That's it. Little BASTARD! EHHHH!

**Brutarian:** This is just what hit me when I was listening to No Wow, you know? WHO is this little bastard? The words are SO beautiful on the record. It's heartbreaking. But...this drum machine is driving me fuckin CRAZY! It's so efficient, and who the fuck does he think he is? Doing all this great work for you guys, and he doesn't even have a soul!

**JH:** It does drive people crazy. They come up to us, they say you need a drummer! I like that it pisses people off.

**Brutarian:** It doesn't piss me off! I fucking love that drum machine. I prefer it!

**JH:** I like that it bugs people. All the things I love have a sort of imperfection running through them. The Velvet Underground, almost every song has an imperfection driven through it! They'll write an amazing song, like "Femme Fatale," and have, like, the backing vocals, [singing like a retard] "FUM FAY-TULLLLLLL!!!!"

**AM:** (laughing wildly)

**JH:** They have this sort of German machine woman singing. I just love that sort of imperfection.

**Brutarian:** Well, a drum machine is so very guerilla. That's terrifying, the fucking CONCEPT of the guerilla! The Viet Cong! They wrought major havoc!

**AM:** (laughing)

**JH:** It's very anti-rock'n'roll as well, and I like that. Rock'n'roll is very much about explosions and tempo changes...the ENERGY! Being able to explode all the time! But we just said, that was a torture device, when we started!

**AM:** When you can't explode, you're just like awwwwooooh!

**JH:** Intentionally holding back all the time! And what we found was that the more we held BACK, the more there was this tension, you know you...you...can never just EXPLODE! So, yeah...we really relied on that.

**Brutarian:** That is just so fucking great. That's...really, to me? That's what MAKES you guys great. That little bastard.

**JH:** We did a show in Sheffield, and Bobby Gillespie played drums, on "Kissy Kissy."

**AM:** Oh my GOD...

**JH:** It was just MENTAL. It was like watching some old Jesus and Mary Chain footage. [NOTE: Primal Scream front man Bobby Gillespie was the original, slow, minimalist drummer for Jesus and Mary Chain.] But by the end of the song, he's got to go TWICE as fast.

**AM:** (laughing)

**JH:** It was just SO weird, the dynamics of being held back, just so bizarre.

**Brutarian:** That's so true, what you're saying, and the power of the Little Bastard, because-

**AM:** (laughing)

**Brutarian:** -even a great cultural messiah like Bobby Gillespie can be reduced to the level of the Little Bastard, because the Bastard is that powerful!

**JH:** Yeah! Bobby is the only one who has taken the place of the Little Bastard.

**Brutarian:** ABSOLUTE OPTIMISM! Working for the better tomorrow, which I think you guys are...at the same time, you've got a total fatalism trip going on, big time. You've got Manson and Starkweather imagery, very full on powerful, in all your music. Have you found that your ultimate agenda has been misunderstood by people?

**JH:** Yeah. We've got the privilege of being critiqued by the music press, who have what is probably the most hollow and most dumb way of reviewing things.

**Brutarian:** But they're not working class. It seems like, to really

(laughs) respect what Manson and Starkweather did (laughs)...uh, the romance of that, that whole thing of being lost, and ripped off, of there being nothing else that you can possibly do, except fucking explode. That's profoundly romantic, I think... that's something that you don't hear in music, that isn't exactly popular, the hardcore identification with that stuff...my response to that is WHY? Why not Starkweather, why not more of that, on that level? Why not more songs like your song "Dead Road 7," get locked in that scene, in that thought, because that's where the life is!

**JH:** Yeah. But I don't know, it seems-

**Brutarian:** What I'm asking is, and I'm babbling now, but why is a recognition of that romance so lacking in music today?

**AM:** It's what we were saying earlier. Those themes just aren't accepted yet.

**Brutarian:** They're very old themes.

**AM:** Yeah, they really are. And in music, they are in music as well, but...I'm not really on the level of the music press, but maybe that was a part of music at one point and... then it went away somehow. It went away with MTV and Clear Channel, everything trying to be promoted as family entertainment.

**Brutarian:** Well, I think they just have a scummy prejudice against people who really fucking mean it, maaaaaan.

**JH & AM:** [laughing]

**JH:** We mean it. Maaaaaan.

**AM:** That's a great way to put it. I think you're right. But I really don't know. But the hard stuff is too problematic, I guess. They don't want uprisings, they don't want anything. There just can't even be uprisings. Except for secret ones. Everybody gets put in jail for everything. Everything! There's laws that say you can't have more than ten people in a room, if they don't live there. Otherwise, it's a party, and otherwise, it's illegal, and otherwise on and on. There's so many crazy things that you can't even second guess what the rules are, because there's too many of them. Yeah, I don't know what goes on with those writers who get us wrong. I don't know why they can't see it. I don't know if it isn't that they are just so far gone that they can't even think that way. You meet people every once in a while who change your mind about that. But for the most part, you don't meet them.

**Brutarian:** That's because they're all HIDING IN THEIR BASEMENTS!

**AM:** Yeah they are, and they can't get jobs.

**JH:** So much stuff that people wrote decades and decades ago has come true, now more so than ever. All of what the Dadaists said, and the Situationists said, and the Existentialists said, they're more relevant now than ever! Now, everything has become this huge fucking spectacle, and everybody just appreciates things in only one way. You go and read a book, or watch a film, or listen to a record, and everyone just wants to know, "Did you LIKE it?" (laughs) "Did you LIKE it!"

**Brutarian:** Well who gives a fuck about LIKE, right?

**JH:** Yeah!

**AM:** What does that even mean?

**JH:** "Did you like it?" Yeah, it was cool. Or no, it SUCKED. It's just bizarre; the way people respond to things. Like, there's no sense of just taking something on BOARD, and just, feeling it...working it out, outside of whether you liked it or not.

**Brutarian:** I saw a movie with a guy a few years ago, and this is a guy I thought I could trust, because he drank too much, and we come out of the film, it was *Minority Report*, the Spielberg film. And we come out, and he says, "So Gene...THUMBS UP?"

**JH & AM:** (laughing)

**Brutarian:** And I said, "What do you mean, Thumbs up'?" And he went to explain to me the concept of Siskel and Ebert, which I obviously understood. I got that, okay. That's not what I was asking him. That kind of experience just pushes me further into the wretched white trash soul of your stuff...like, well...I'm thinking now about Lou Reed. Lou Reed never said much about, or didn't seem to care too much about the midwest, the badlands. See, that was Bruce Springsteen's job, and he covered that pretty accurately in *Nebraska*, the album called *Nebraska*. Your records sound more like *Nebraska* to me than any other kinds of records. That's what I like so much about them.

**Brutarian:** You guys have taken it upon yourselves (laughs) to define... the heart of darkness! Of Middle America! Why?

**AM:** Part of it comes from traveling a lot. We've driven through Middle America a lot. Is Michigan considered Middle America?



**Brutarian:** It is. But we're still in the same time zone as New York.

**AM:** We were living in Bell Harbor, Michigan. It's a ghost town, really. One of the songs on the new record is about that. We went to this Meijers supermarket. This is the only open store in Bell Harbor at night, the only thing going on. There's... there's nothing, there. We're just observing what kids would do there, for fun. And what they did was, they got really fucking dressed up, to go to this grocery store, to try and meet boys, to try and meet respective partners... It's strange to see what happens, when people have nowhere to go. When there are no thriving big cities, and there's only the grocery store. It's strange to see how people fall in love, and meet people. What they do, and what their interests are.

**Brutarian:** You are very romantically attracted to that. Your first record had a lot of atmosphere of that sort.

**AM:** I find it really interesting! And I find it very upsetting as well. And sad, and beautiful. I like taking pictures of it. It's a real love and hate thing. It was the same for me, growing up in a small town in Florida. I used to travel around with my parents all the time. I used to camp in those places, and see it. It's like glue there, people do not get out, people never make it out.

**JH:** I think you get a very weird sense, traveling through America... if you're an atheist, and you have no interest in money, there's really nothing left for you. And your observations become really bizarre, if that's the case, you know. If you don't have god, and you don't have money in your life, than what is there here? They seem like the things that stop everyone from rioting. Something has got to

be stopping everyone from rioting, in this country. It's got to be those two things, or one of them! So if you don't have any interest in either one of them, I guess you just turn it into...bullshit art.

**Brutarian:** Fuck art let's kill.

**JH:** Or something, you know?

**Brutarian:** But you do have a nihilist outlook... somewhat...

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*I find it really interesting! And I find it very upsetting as well. And sad, and beautiful. I like taking pictures of it. It's a real love and hate thing.*

*—Alison Mosshart*

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**JH:** Yeah, I don't think there's much left. I think I've been kind of forced into being like this, really. I feel like I'm forced into being nihilist. Just because...there's not much beauty in anything, except watching it all come tumbling down, and turning it into music, or writing, or a film, or whatever.

**Brutarian:** I think you're right. Look, if they had maybe...gotten it right for the last 25 fuckin years, maybe you wouldn't be being forced into that position. I feel the effects of that too! But they've gotten it all so fuckin wrong, you almost have to go back, and...you're being forced into a pre-defined role, is what it is.

**JH:** I don't think it's gonna go back. I think that rock'n'roll has run its course. All those amazing things that happened in music, it was because amazing things were being channeled. It was always the birth of something new. The birth of the

beatniks, the birth of the hippies, the birth of punk, the birth of disco, all these things. And now, what? It's the birth of the pseudo-indie label.

**Brutarian:** Hah hah.

**JH:** Is that it?

**Brutarian:** It wouldn't be so bad if these people had a sense of danger... or damage, maybe? Or willingness to be damaged...to prove a point, which...going back to Sid Vicious, he had that! The Pistols had that. And look at them, I mean... they got knifed in alleys. You can't possibly underestimate the severity of that.

**JH:** Why is it then, that those people sold records? I hate to be cliched about it, but back then, that was a global phenomenon. But now...nothing with any slight bit of travesty or danger is-

**Brutarian:** Rotten was genuinely intelligent, and intellectual. But...I think that the last 30 years of film and music and literature falls on you, and it's a heavy weight. But you also have that to feed upon...and you guys are doing that! I think the Kills are much more intelligent in a way, than the Pistols, because you have to be, in order to survive all of this. Just because there's that huge weight to carry. That's the thing there...what people have said about your music, that it's not about what is played on the records, but what is not played. There's sense of a direct conflict going on with the zeitgeist, call it that or whatever you will, but it's in the music. So, I guess you have to count on people to understand that. And maybe you can't count on them really, but at least it's there. That's why I'm doing this interview, I'm trying to help to articulate something which you are both at the forefront

of, but it's a very fucking hard thing to articulate. But yeah, this is DYNAMITE!

**JH:** (laughing)

**Brutarian:** But that's not a question. This second album is a lot spookier, and more emotionally concentrated than the first record. It's almost like the first record had to break down a wall, it was a lot more aggressive... the second record comes out, and you're letting all these ghosts come out to play. With a lot more restraint and subtlety. There's the meanness in the new album...but do you feel like you've lanced your spiritual BOIL?

**JH:** I hope not.

**Brutarian:** Well why NOT!

**JH:** Because I thrive on that! That's what keeps me going! I can never exorcise all my demons! I hope I haven't. That's what drives me on! Look, No Wow was born out of being on the road for a year, touring the first record. It was all our observations, all our emotional conflicts. All the themes of No Wow came from the road.

**Brutarian:** What surprised you most about that year on the road, what came at you from that, that you hadn't presupposed, about America, about Europe, and about...where young people are right now...

**AM:** I thought it was quite fantastic. Because we didn't do that much press. We just didn't do press, for a really long time. What was happening was, people were finding it really hard to track us down. People were just talking about it, there was this very strong word of mouth feeling. Quite exciting, being that the word of mouth thing doesn't exist so much anymore. People were telling about

the band, rather than reading about the band.

**Brutarian:** That's the impression I get. You guys just drain yourselves on stage every night. I can't even imagine how you can keep up that level of adrenal overload.

**AM:** It's great. It's so much fun! It's that one moment of the day where you get to be and do whatever you want! It's a stage.

**JH:** The stakes are pretty high- I mean, I went to college and did a degree and I worked... pretty hard... but not really...I just did enough. And I came up first! And I was really disappointed...that I got the best mark. I just thought, is that all there is? Do you only have to do that amount of work? I always feel like I always overestimate how much you have to do, how much you have to give. I'm always disappointed...by it.

**AM:** How much people will just accept, just take this and that's enough.

**JH:** I didn't think we did half enough! And people ask us, how do you do it? I just don't feel like...I'm not gonna be happy until I just give'em everything, until I just can't MOVE anymore. Somehow, for some reason, something just happened to me...I think my stakes are just a lot higher. Sometimes, to an embarrassing degree. But they just fucking are! They're high! (laughs) I expect more. I want more. I want more out of it. It can't just be like this

**Brutarian:** So, there is a dark side to the music and I've read every dark book, from Hubert Selby, to Bukowski...Bukowski is- I love him, but after David Peace he is like popcorn to me.

**AM:** Oh yeah, such a bore!

**Brutarian:** Bukowski?

**AM:** Yeah.

**Brutarian:** Oh really?

**AM:** I can't stand it. It bores me. I have read three Bukowski books. It's all the same.

**Brutarian:** So what do you like? What are you reading?

**JH:** With Bukowski, I don't feel like I'm learning anything. It's no big deal to me. This thing of how getting drunk makes you better-

**Brutarian:** OH! Watch it now!

**JH:** Look, I just don't need to read twelve novels about it.

**Brutarian:** So how do you guys manage to get drunk every night, and then maintain your electrifyingly sexually intense stage performances without complete breakdown?

**AM:** We do not get drunk every night. We get drunk every once in a while. We used to-

**JH:** We get drunk every other night!

**AM:** Sometimes, you just can't. When you have to get up early and-

**Brutarian:** When you're on tour, right!

**AM:** We've done that before! And it just ends in really bad sickness. Cancellations and stuff. I can't cope with drinking every night, I just can't do it.

**Brutarian:** What's the worst trouble that you've had so far, on tour?

**AM:** Hmmm..I don't know.

**Brutarian:** Do you have fans like me, who just scream at you from out of nowhere-

**AM:** Yeah!

**Brutarian:** Creepy Mister Bad Vibes, real psychotic?

**JH:** Shut up.

**Brutarian:** They come out from behind amplifiers and say, "OOOH! WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN ALL OF THESE YEARS?" Do they offer you all kinds of substances?

**AM:** We don't have really really terrible times, but...

**JH:** I don't know what other bands go through, maybe they get all that. One thing's for sure, in music...is that even the shit-est band in the world, is somebody's favorite band. Dunno if that answers your question, but it's true.

**Brutarian:** But don't you pull some of the cellar dwellers out of their little hidey-holes?

**JH:** I hope so.

**Brutarian:** Are you attracting the right people?

**AM:** We got a lot of amazing letters. That's one of the only ways I can tell. Because you can't talk to every single person that came. Usually, you get to talk to five, six, seven people every night, while they are ushering everyone out of the club. So you just get the people that really do wanna talk, and they're just sneakin around, waiting.

**JH:** This tour, more than any tour

before, people are just coming up because they're fans. Whereas before that, you had people who talked about how someone had namedropped us, or about how there was this "Sexual chemistry" thing. They'd say, "IT WAS LIKE FUCKING ON STAGE!"

**Brutarian:** Can you deny that though? Because it IS like fucking on stage! It's the most fucking I've ever seen on stage in my life!

**JH:** (chuckling)

**Brutarian:** WHAT? You're laughing now, but-

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This tour, more than any tour before, people are just coming up because they're fans.

—*Jamie Hince*

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**AM:** I can't deny it, because that's what people see. But you know, that's the beauty of performance, that's the beauty of being on stage and feeling free to do whatever you want. The stage is the fucking line. That's your space, and all those people on the other side are, well..it's you against them. And they're thinking what they want to think.

**Brutarian:** Can you honestly say that you didn't expect that reaction when you were writing and rehearsing these songs?

**JH:** Yes, I can honestly say that.

**AM:** Look, we don't know what we're like, to other people. We write everything, and it's just the two of us, in a room. We play it on the stage like it's just the two of us in that room. We don't even look at anybody. We never

knew, for a really long time, what people were thinking. I don't think you can plan on that stuff. You can't just decide to be that way. On stage, I can't control any of it.

**Brutarian:** So what's going through your heads, when you're up there, FUCKING ON STAGE, hah hah hah, okay okay, as people see it, what are you experiencing?

**AM:** It's like daydreaming.

**JH:** I've already cut off the rest of the world, really. We spend 24 hours a day together. We work together, we live together, we socialize together...and...everything to me, that one hour of being on stage, is just a buildup to that. We just try to get lost in it. We really don't even know what we're doing. I don't build any sort of sexual thing. For people watching it, well if that's what they get then that's what they

get. It's definitely not going through my head. I'd love to be able to, some days, to just go off the stage and just walk all over everybody and just beat a couple of people with a guitar, but I don't do that so it just comes out in weird ways.

**Brutarian:** Yeah, that's what we need. That thing where, you don't look at the audience. You're not making contact with them. Would you guys consider yourselves isolationists in a general or explicit sense? Where, okay yeah, we're doing something, and you're seeing it because you paid, because you paid to see something you're really not meant to see?

**AM:** I think we are definitely isolationist as a whole. It's changed over time. It's a look. But we don't talk to them. I'm starting to find it really interesting to see people looking scared, when I look at them.



**Brutarian:** If all laws were abolished and you could do whatever the fuck you wanted, without fear of recrimination, would your stage act differ from what it is now? If you could abuse the audience directly, would you do that and how would you do that?

**AM:** Well, that would definitely mean a different environment for the show to happen in. And for the people to be in. Things would be so much different. All those capacity rules, and all those safety rules, all those things that make everything at a live show a certain way, all that shit would be gone. So who knows what would happen? But definitely, something much more exciting.

**Brutarian:** This may seem like a stupid question, because you're a band, that's what you do, you do music, but have you thought about going beyond that? Will the Kills someday go beyond music?

**JH:** Yeah. You know, we spend more time doing other things, doing art and photography and writing, than we do doing music. Music just happens to be what we've become known for. At the moment, there's this French publisher who's doing a book of ours, of artwork and photographs and journal entries and stuff. That's coming together. So yeah...I definitely want to do that, I want to much more, things other than music.

**Brutarian:** You had mentioned in one interview, bringing in Gerard Malanga, and he's with Lou Reed and Andy Warhol's stuff. Do you think it's possible to bring back the old...in a way that galvanizes now, in a way that has nothing to do with nostalgia?

**JH:** It's very hard in music.

**Brutarian:** I mean, to bring back the old energy for new energy, without being romantic about it.

**JH:** It's hard to work out whether you're borrowing from some of those old ideas or whether you're...okay, so there's certain things you know you know, like...doing a record of just droning isn't gonna have the same impact as when John Cale did it. Or when-

**Brutarian:** -Alan Vega, Martin Rev. Suicide.

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Something that can be a beginning. That's what we want for ourselves.

—*Alison Mosshart*

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**JH:** - or swearing on TV, is not gonna get you on the front page of every newspaper, like when the Sex Pistols did Bill Grundy. Now, it starts to become a bit abstract. I don't even know what the equivalent would be now.

**Brutarian:** But you guys are really searching for that. You're taking it upon yourselves to do what no other fucking band is doing right now. No other band is letting that huge fucking responsibility fall into their lap. No other band is accepting that responsibility. And you're going... into the future. It has to take a huge toll on you, to put everything on the line, as you have done, to do the undone. The not-said.

**JH:** I don't know. I want to get into a situation where I'm not taking anything on board from the past. Because that's one thing that's really

stupid about music at the moment, is that it's all so referenced, it's all so nostalgic. Where reference becomes everything. I'd really...look, okay... I'd really like to get to a point where I can shut all that out. I don't know if it's possible, but I want to be a forward thinking man! I want to break ground, like those bands who inspired me did. Not just copy them, but really break ground. That's what we're heading for. That's the world we're trying to create. But will we get there?

**AM:** Something that can be a beginning. That's what we want for ourselves.

**Brutarian:** Well, a lot of people want that but they don't have the courage to do it, because the fascism of the underground seems so strong right now... the White Stripes made it, and I fucking hate the White Stripes by the way. I hate everything about them. What?

**AM:** Aww. They're sweet...

**Brutarian:** Yeah. They're cute. But we don't need more cuteness! This whole thing is that the underground has become too fucking nice, hasn't it?

**JH:** Yeah.

**AM:** Yeah, that's true, that's true.

[Apparently, we are in Jack White's turf and he is lurking, so I'm supposed to keep my voice down.]

**Brutarian:** You guys are the fucking Charlie Mansons, who are gonna save us, right?

**AM:** Uh heh! Uh hah hah hah!

**JH:** Don't you think?

**Brutarian:** Yeah, yeah I do.

**JH:** He's one of the most intelligent men alive!

**Brutarian:** Ian Brady and Myra Hindley.

**AM:** Oh, we were recording our first record on the day she died. We collected all the newspapers.

**Brutarian:** You two would never do anything that horrible, that's just wrong! I'm not a person who lacks morality. But to imply the implicit disregard for normalcy, that Ian and Myra went forward with...I think that it takes that kind of aberrant bravery, right now, to make something great happen.

**JH:** I was always interested in them, interested about Manson and Myra Hindley...I think the the reason that all those people had so much impact, in doing something so disgusting, was that...and this is really cheap, but I do believe it...was that they looked like cinematic icons, all those people.

**Brutarian:** And look at the two of you, fuck. Perfect!

**JH:** And that's really important. I'm fascinated by these people being a product of their times. Because that's what it is. It's not something to condone, it's not something to agree or disagree with. It's just a product of the times.

**Brutarian:** Well, it'd be awfully wrong to agree with any kind of murder, but I'm just saying that no matter how wrong something is, in the bigger picture, something true can arise, and you can look back on it and appropriate a certain urgency from that, that makes sense, culturally, and can also-

**JH:** I don't know...I'm fascinated that it's just a product of the time, you know? And it can't just be swept under carpet. And it's so fucking incredible that those people are attractive in a cinematic, iconic way.

**Brutarian:** They are! Alison, there's a photo of you on Keep On Your Mean Side where you look very much like Myra Hindley...not physically, but the overall style...the lighting...it has that Moors Murderer vibe, it's fuckin heavy. Was that a conscious thing-

**JH:** No.

**Brutarian:** -on your part to capitalize-

**JH:** No.

**Brutarian:** -on the demon romance of Myra and Ian? Because they were lovers...is there not something-

**JH:** Okay, wait-

**Brutarian:** -yes, they killed a child.

They killed more than one child. But...were they not doing something inherently relevant, something that was central to the politics of romance, when they did that disgusting thing?

**JH:** Aww. I think that's a whole can of worms-

**Brutarian:** I wanna open that can of worms up!

**AM:** (nervous laughter)

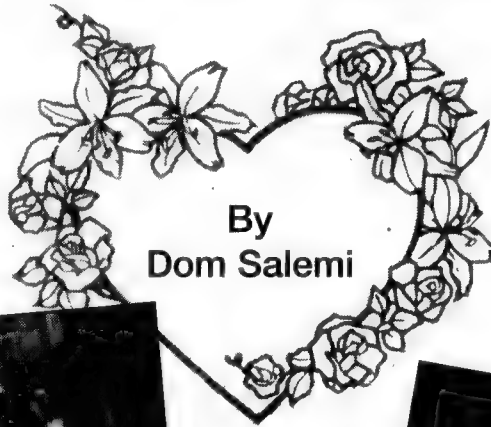
**JH:** Well what can I say? They were doing something hideous, and they were doing something that...has, yeah, left it's mark on history. And I do think there's something iconic about the imagery of it.

**Brutarian:** Yeah, but you guys are the next. You guys are THE NEXT! The future...is murder. Like Leonard Cohen said.

**JH:** Don't make me kill, Gene. Don't make me kill again. (laughs)

# Nobody's Sweethearts

THE GREAT LOST HIGH SCHOOL SWEETHEARTS INTERVIEW



By  
Dom Salemi



**F**rankly, we're not sure why such a talented combo like this one, suffered all manner of angst and writers' block and personnel changes while working on their fab new disc. While The Sweethearts deny anything unusual took place in the gestation period between their first and second discs, we ain't buying it. Especially as it took more than five years before the follow up to their 1999 debut, *Passing Notes*. It just has to be impediments like crappy songs, infighting, dementia and unspeakable tragedy, no? Because it's not like their glorious power pop punk premiere was savaged. It wasn't, drawing favorable comparisons to the likes of Blondie and The Ramones and The Go-Go's. Which, in turn, led to the group playing on bills with legends like The Fleshtones, Hasil Adkins (rest in pieces) and Electric Frankenstein.

We realize all of this is besides the point. We just thought it was interesting. We know the point, for you, the reader and CD buyer, is simply whether The Sweethearts are any good and whether they have any thing to say. Well, of course they do. You try to make it as a rock 'n' roll unit in The Big Apple while holding down jobs like phone sex operator and fry cook and you'll end up with plenty of things to say. Interesting things. About this. About that. And other things. Lots of things . . .

So we start off asking Cynthia and John about the new disc - a terrific piece of punk and glam flavored Goffin-King styled pop - and then, as so many of the songs are about sex and love and break-ups, we corral Cynthia and Paige, the other woman, to wax and wane on such subjects.



**Brutarian:** *Is this the band Lil Steven kept chiding for promising the new album and it being constantly delayed?*

**Cynthia:** Yes, that's us. More specifically, for better or worse, it was our label he was chiding. They didn't deserve all the blame for the delay since we hit a few glitches with the artwork too. It's always, "Hurry up and wait" with these things. Anyway, he liked what he heard and was anxious for the album to come out since he'd been saying it would. But, all's well that ends well. I'm glad he was so enthusiastic about it when it finally came out. And it probably lent to creating some anticipation!

**Brutarian:** *Why five years between releases?*

**John:** It didn't start out that way . . . We had been recording as early as the summer of 2000, but we had some line-up adjustments. We started regrouping, etc. and then resumed reording in 2002. The finished tapes, however, sat until 2004, when Get Hip finally was ready for us again. Plus, it's not always a bad thing to create a "want" for new stuff rather than have too much out there.

**Cynthia:** I agree, in music it should always be quality over quantity, no doubt about it.

**Brutarian:** *Don't understand why the band is always getting compared to Blondie? You have a much harder rock sound and besides they only put out one good album -the first - and you already have two.*

**John:** There's always a "Blondie" comparison everytime there's a girl singer in a punky-type band . . . I've seen that comparison ad nauseum in many bands, but none of them ever sound like Blondie in any case - Oh, there's a girl singing in a punk band . . . Eh, they sound like Blondie, I guess. In our case, I think it's cause the music from a "girl-group" influence is there. Just like Blondie. In fact, it's been documented that Debbie Harry liked The Angels very much, and as the lead singer with The Angels was Cynthia's aunt, I guess that's as close to

home as you can get.

**Cynthia:** There's The Angels /Blondie connection again, Blondie's first was produced by Richard Gotterher, was it not? The intro of "X-Offender" is an homage to "My Boyfriend's Back," I always loved that. I don't think we particularly sound like Blondie, but on the other hand I do understand the comparison. I think sometimes you can hear the Jersey accent in my singing, it's probably because of that as much as anything else.

**Brutarian:** *What we think, among other things, that places you above so many of the bands grouped together in the garage rock revival, is the exceptional guitar work. You already commented on this in an e-mail to me but we'd love to hear your take on it again.*



Cynthia

**John:** Well, thank you very much for the compliment first off . . . Our approach has always been more traditional rock and roll rather than exclusively the garage-type sound. That garage-fuzz is a great sound, but it really wouldn't fit in our band with our songs. Additionally, I feel there's only so far you can take it . . . With our blend of electric and acoustic, six and twelve string, standard and open tuning, we can play a lot of different ways without sounding stale or dated.

**Cynthia:** I think that having John and Bill constantly switch off on lead and rhythm is our secret weapon. We get the best of both worlds that way. They both have a lot of style. Their styles that are very different, but complimentary. Guitar attack is everything in rock and roll. When you're playing a lot of power chords, subtleties can make or break you. It's not so dependent on virtuosity, but you'd better have style and command. That's what makes it great. I don't play guitar, but I've become a very accomplished listener..

**Brutarian:** *Principal differences between this new work and your debut offering?*

**John:** Good question, not an easy answer but I'll give it a go. On the first record we went for something that would be how we played and sounded live . . . We even recorded it live in the studio. We didn't record and piece it together later, the engineer hit record and we went for it. The songs themselves were two and three minute tracks based around the traditional r&b/rock and roll structure that seemed to jump out like a live show. There are a few longer, somewhat ballad-type things sandwiched in there, but it's a pretty good example of a "love show" type record. On the second one, we had a better showcase of songs written over time, spanning a few years. That was more of a rock record that you'd put on and listen to, rather than one with you imagining us playing it live right in front of you. The general sound and style is still there, but in my opinion, the "vibe" is different.

**Cynthia:** Yep, definitely different vibe -but it's not a 180. I agree it still very much sounds like us- but it reflects the evolution soundwise that had begun even before the *FIRST* album was out.

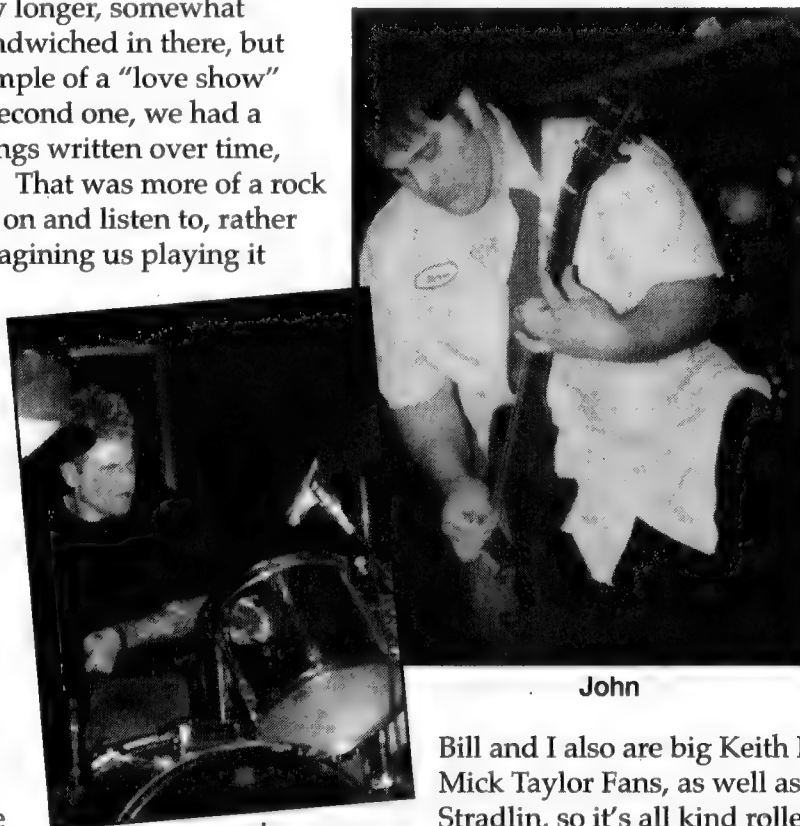
**Brutarian:** *Did having two songs featured on the Lil Steven radio show help your visibility?*

**John:** At this point, it's actually three songs he's playing, and from what I can tell, it's put our name out there in a bigger way. Mainly, it helped Get Hip pick up the pace on putting the second record out, so that alone was worth it.

**Cynthia:** Certainly can't hurt!

**Brutarian:** *Some of the songs - particularly the one about there being a someone for everyone - are rather sweet, kind of surprising for a songwriter who worked as a phone sex operator. We'd expect ALL your takes on love and intimacy to be decidedly jaded.*

**Cynthia:** That's "Everybody." Yep, it's hopeful, encouraging, positive and sweet. I reckon that's just the way I am! Oh wait... John wrote all the words to that one. Seriously though- usually John's lyrics will cover the extremes, or provide an outline- then mine will sort of tie them all together. But regarding that particular song, yes, John really did write most of the words.



Dennis

John

**Brutarian:** *We hear a bit of glam here and there, particularly in some of the guitar solos. Are you big fans of Mick Ronson?*

**John:** I most certainly am, especially on *The Man Who Sold The World*. I always loved his trashy style, especially his live leads where he'd just hammer on one note and walk around with his other arm up in the air. Classic cock rock!

Bill and I also are big Keith Richards/Ron Woods/Mick Taylor Fans, as well as later greats like Izzy Stradlin, so it's all kind rolled into one.

**Brutarian:** *And speaking of which, that was an interesting choice of covers with the Bowie "Moonage Daydream" which is an ode to Uranian or man-love.*

**John:** I really wanted to do it mainly to see if we could pull it off, which I felt we did really well. It's got a great tension to it, even in the jazzy-style they did it in. The Bowie at the Beeb Version is my favorite. Plus that classic guitar solo at the end was made for a Ronson fan like me . . . Additionally, we used a theremin at the very end for that spacey sound.

**Cynthia:** It's a blast to sing too. It's a really balls out song but by the same token, it's kind of a 'crooner'. That combination is my specialty. It always goes over really well live. I think it's not an obvious

choice for us, and that's what makes it so fun. The church of man love is SUCH a holy place to be.

**Brutarian:** *Love to hear about the influences on the sound as High School Sweethearts is an interesting mix of a number of things - girl group, garage, glam, trad rock - without really giving into slavish devotion as to any of them.*

**John:** I'd say Cynthia's musical roots were the biggest influence on the sound, bringing the girl-group, Beatles' thing to the table... combined with the revved up guitar-driven influence I brought, topped with a farfisa and lots of harmonies and percussion. How can you lose? Plus, one thing I've always kept in mind is: keep the backbeat driving... Make them wanna dance... If you can tap your foot and remember it, you're almost home. That philosophy has spanned all styles.

**Cynthia:** It's all about the song. If you have a good song, you have a good song, regardless of genre. John's good at coming up with the great simple riffs-forming an infrastructure of hooks that are at the heart of all the songs. I am a pop fan- to me, melody is king. So put the two together and you've got something special. It's a universal formula for good reason-it works!

[LATER WE CORRALLED CYNTHIA AND PAIGE AND ASKED THEM ABOUT THINGS NAUGHTY AND NOT-SO-NICE]

**Brutarian:** *So what's with this "mean" and "women"? There is some important difference between the sexes here?*

**Cynthia:** Did you intend to write "mean," instead

of "men?" If so, you've already figured out the difference! Or was that a Freudian typo?

**Paige:** Depends on the day. Sometimes we are mean, sometimes we are women.

**Brutarian:** *Shouldn't it be men and woe man? Some of the songs on the new cd seem to indicate that the fairer sex is more than capable of holding their own.*

**Cynthia:** I think many of us, most of us in fact, are. The thing is, there is the truly strong, empowered female, and then there's the kind that PLAYS it just tough and bitchy enough to be sexy. Can you be both at once? That's the challenge.

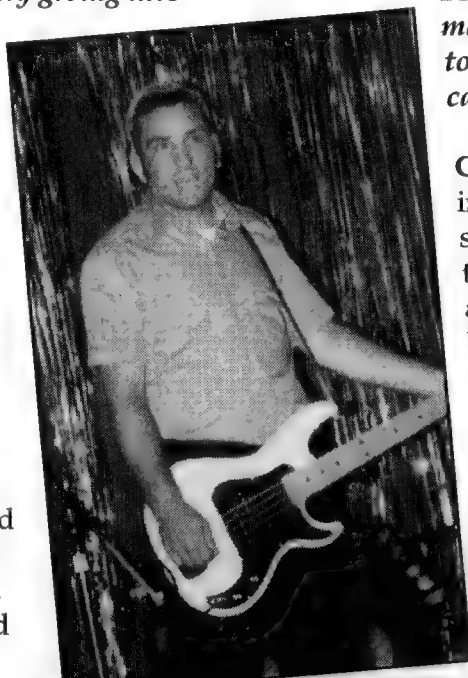
**Brutarian:** *Another song talks about, or suggests, that finding a soul mate is more than possible. How does one find one's soul mate? I advertised for a late twenty something who looked like a goddess in a parochial school outfit and found my dream girl. So we're talking internet here rather than patient waiting and watching?*

**Cynthia:** I'm sure it's possible. I don't think you get just one, though. That's sort of silly. You made an effort, and were rewarded. An effort is always commendable. And a good attitude is key. If you think there's no one out there worth being with, then maybe you don't REALLY want a

relationship.

**Paige:** Totally. Sometimes you really have to make a conscious effort and keep at it, but if you open yourself up and let yourself hang out there, you might be surprised by all the meaningful connections you make with people.

**Brutarian:** *Psychologists say that men try on sex to see if a relationship will work, whereas a woman looks to establish a relationship to see if*



Top photo: Jason. Bottom photo: Billy



*intimacy is possible.*

**Cynthia:** Maybe in some cases but that's a blanket statement that I tend not to agree with. If it were true, a lot more men would probably be in relationships.

**Paige:** Psychologists say a lot of things.

**Brutarian:** *Then again, we've heard that five minutes after meeting a man, a woman knows whether she wants to sleep with him or not.*

**Cynthia:** We get the feeling if we should or shouldn't sleep with them, but it doesn't confirm that we will or we won't. Maybe women are less likely to have sex with someone they're not immediately attracted to, whereas a guy will? It's the ol' female selectiveness versus the male's spreading the seed thing. There's truth to that.

**Paige:** I don't know about sleeping with someone.. but I can pretty much tell immediately if I want to kiss them. I think its immediately after kissing them that I know if I want to sleep with them. Selectiveness at work, perhaps.

**Brutarian:** *And if by some miracle of miracles, a couple manages to stay together for a period of time, how do they manage to keep the physical side exciting?*

**Cynthia:** First you accept that it's not going to stay as exciting as it is at first. Then you keep your attitude positive and don't make such a big deal out of it. Enjoy the fact that you know someone really well, and know what works for you. Then throw in a curveball every once in awhile. There are about a million books on the subject, too. But I say put the book down and go give your husband a blowjob. You can figure this stuff out on your own. If maintaining excitement is indeed what you're looking for, a little effort goes a long way.

**Paige:** Cynthia, I think you just had the best line of all time.

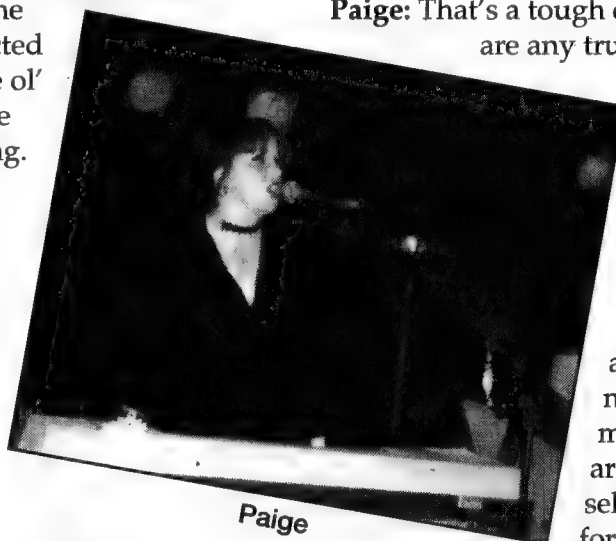
**Brutarian:** *In general, what do you think is a man's greatest failing as a lover?*

**Cynthia:** Men are naturally more self involved. They take care of themselves and their own desires. They don't think twice about it. Some would even say they can tend to be selfish. And when they're NOT selfish, when they just behave how any woman probably would, they're considered generous and special and wonderful, and oooo, how lucky we are to have a decent lover. I don't think it's intentional, it's just the way it is. I don't think I wanna focus in on the greatest failings anyway. It's the greatest successes I am interested in!

**Paige:** That's a tough one, really. I don't think there are any true "failings." Someone just told me that men fall in love with their eyes and women fall in love with their ears. That said, I think a man who is interested in being a great lover would score major points by being conservatively poetic, or at least complimentary in a non-sleazy fashion. I hear too many stories about men who are, as Cynthia put it, more self-involved. If you're looking for specific pointers without breaking the bank, a simple, "You look beautiful" goes a long way.

**Brutarian:** *Diamanda Galas in an interview with us and other publications, has said that men can never be effective lovers of women until they have been penetrated by a woman, preferably one wearing a strap on. Something about penetration leading to vulnerability and to sensitivity.*

**Cynthia:** To some extent, symbolically if nothing else, she has a point. Men often want to give up control and be dominated by a woman sexually. But there's the rub- only sexually. Plus-when you ask to be dominated, and you ask for something specific that turns you on, and you get exactly what you ask for, are you really being dominated? Uh,no. But I am veering off the subject. Strap on? Amen. Go ahead, make my day.



Paige

**Paige:** I love her.

**Brutarian:** *Now that we're getting kinky, and as one of you has worked as a phone-sex operator, what is the youngest acceptable age to assume in sexual role play?*

**Cynthia:** If someone asked me to pretend to be a teenager, or worse, a child, I wouldn't play. I know that nothing besides this fantasy is going to work for that person, and I want no part of it. I'm not talking about something just visual-like aforementioned parochial school uniform- stuff like that is really just bringing you back to early feelings of being turned on, and that's fine. But beyond that, no.

**Paige:** Also, acting out a younger age implies a submission thing, which kind of negates the whole tough-as-sexy something to break sexual philosophy (see #2).

**Brutarian:** *Interesting take you have, Cynthia on porn as possibly being harmful to a guy's romantic side.*

**Cynthia:** I'm certainly not a prude, there's nothing inherently wrong with it, and it's fun. It's overkill and dependence on it that's toxic to relationships. When the porn, or the fantasy, is getting you off and has nothing whatsoever to do with the reality, the flesh and bone person you are with-- there's a problem. So boys (or girls, where applicable, but trust me, it's not), when you get yourself a partner, lay off for a bit. Have fun with HER. Give your hand a couple of weeks off. You'll notice that you're a lot more interested (and interesting) and she'll look even more appealing to you. This is a pretty simple concept, but even so it's hard to convince people that they'll have better sex if they ease up

on the porn, if they're addicted to it anyway... but I also don't know who wouldn't want to have more and better sex. So, it's worth a try!

**Brutarian:** *Women are not made to be understood but to be loved.*

**Cynthia:** Like cats? But really, that's just a cop out. (Oooo, I sound like a hippy, or better, like Laurie in the Partridge Family, She loved saying, "Cop out." I love The Partridge Family.) You can't be truly loved without being understood, at least to some extent. Understand?

**Paige:** Ugh, really? Isn't one of life's great pleasures to be understood by others? [sighs, writes manifesto]

## DISCOGRAPHY

### Long Players

Heels 'n Wheels (2005) Get Hip

Passing Notes (1999) Get Hip

### Singles

Find A Way / Single White

Female (1998)

### Selected Comps

It Came From Beyond (2005)

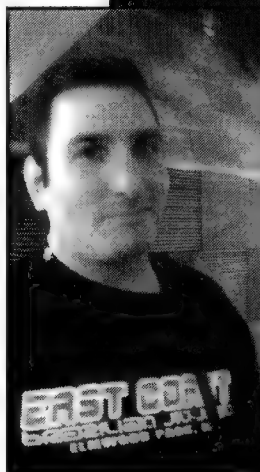
Brutarian

Garage Justice Volume One

(2004) Deep Eddy

Rock N Roll Au Go Go Volume

Two (2003) Devil Doll



Top photo: Paige and Billy;  
left photo: Jason;  
right photo: John.

# The Detroit Cobras

## Got Us Covered

By Dom Salemi

**T**hey're from Detroit. They play obscure 50s and 60s r&b songs with flash and panache and they've got a hot blonde lead singer whose sultry voice can melt the coldest heart on a ballad, inflame the libido of even the most jaded libertine on the faster numbers. After kicking around for about seven years now and relentlessly touring for the last couple of those, The Cobras are finally starting to get their due. That was them singing the "Cha Cha Twist" on the Diet Coke commercial and "Ya Ya (Looking For My Baby)" for Budweiser. That's Playboy telling us The Cobras are America's premiere party band. That's Rolling Stone and Vogue giving out with the major play. Still, despite the fact that the big breakout looms, The Cobras are still a might perturbed at the press continuing to refer to them as a cover band. We sat down with the hot blonde lead singer, aka Rachel Nagy, to find out why as well as a few other things:





**Brutarian:** Well, in looking over the press packet, I can't help noticing how often you're referred to as a "cover band." So you must be one, fifty thousand critics can't be wrong, can they?

**Nagy:** [Laughing] What do critics know? I mean, my God, that's just a lazy shorthand way of describing The Cobras. They're the ones who are always telling the world that bands who have a paucity of original tunes are never going to make it. Well, our records are selling pretty well and we're in constant demand so there you have it. What's a cover band anyway? They're the guys playing Def Leppard covers at your local airport bar.

**Brutarian:** But you do play other composer's works?

**Nagy:** Yes, we do; but we like to think of ourselves as more of a "rediscover" band. We're not playing Motown hits, but little known r&b tunes from the 50s and 60s. What we want to do is let people hear some great music that most people, aside from cultish collector types, are totally unaware of. Hopefully, after listening to some of the things we do, people will go back to the source and check it out and then from there move further afield with their investigations.

**Brutarian:** Additionally, when one thinks of cover bands, one calls to the ear, an almost slavish attention to detail, an almost abnormal desire to recreate the song in every respect.

**Nagy:** Exactly, and that's certainly not what we do. We love the songs and cherish the artists, but we do it our own way. We add a little something to it, try to make it our own. We felt it would be almost disrespectful to do a faithful imitation of the original. What's the point of

that? Besides, when you think about it, it's almost disrespectful, kind of like saying, "Hey, here's how it should've been done."

**Brutarian:** I also see the press release mentioning garage as well.

**Nagy:** Also a misnomer. You think of garage, you think low-fi and inexpressive singing. That ain't us, baby. Anyone can make a do-it-yourself, lousy sounding record with a singer who can't cut it. Don't get me wrong, there's a lot of great new garage bands out there and I'm happy about this revival going on but a lot of it, like anything else, is just crap.

**Brutarian:** So you don't agree with L'il Steven that garage rock is a bunch of white kids trying to do r&b and failing gloriously!

**Nagy:** Well, where does that leave us? We do it really well and a lot of people, even critics feel I have a pretty decent voice. Where does that leave The Rolling Stones? The Animals, and well, you fill in the blanks.

**Brutarian:** Have you heard the new Stones' disc? It's not that bad.

**Nagy:** No, I haven't but that doesn't surprise me; although I haven't purchased a Stones' release in years. I'm sure the new one is quite good, but you know what? I bet if this disc was released by anyone else, people would be falling all over themselves trying to find words to properly praise it. Mick and Keith are just caught in a trap of their own making. They've raised the bar so high, that they can't hope to ever come close to matching what they did. I mean, after Let It Bleed, after Exile On Main Street, where do you go?

**Brutarian:** What do you do then, as an artist, just close up shop?



Mary kicking Rachel (Photo by Heather McDonald)

**Nagy:** That's a good question. I don't know. You always hear artists, of all stripes, talking about making it "new." So I guess you have to try to go in a different direction.

**Brutarian:** Do you worry about such things, after all the band has been around a pretty long time? About fifteen years or so I think.

**Nagy:** No, we only have three full length discs out and we've been through so many changes in that time. Mary, our guitar slinger, and I are the only constants and we both think that's it only now with the players we've added, that we really have the sound we've always strived for. And as far as peaking, no, we've got a ways to go. And there's so many great songs out there that we haven't done . . .

**Brutarian:** . . . covered

**Nagy:** Stop that [laughing]! But have you seen the reviews for our latest disc, *Baby?* News flash! We're not a "covers" band anymore! Oh yes, we started out that way, or a garage band doing r&b. Same thing, I suppose, but now, now, we're branching out because we're doing slower songs. Unbelievable, these are songs that are part of the rich r&b tradition, they're just not uptempo. And songs like this have always been part of our repertoire. It's just a handle, a way of lazily describing the new record. Man, do your research [laughs]!

**Brutarian:** It makes for a story, something a bit more sensational, perhaps. I mean, how many times have you seen a review calling you an ex-stripper? Or that your cult success in Europe has allowed you to garner some dates in the US?

**Nagy:** Well, as for the stripper gig. What else



Mary and Rachel (Photo by Heather McDonald)

is a girl of 17 to do to pay the rent? It was good money and I worked the clubs first as a waitress and said, "Hey, hold on, that looks like fun and they tell me they make really good tips. I only did it for a few years and boy did I get tired talking to desperate, insistent men. I just couldn't take

it any more after a point and I remember calling up one of my friends one night screaming, "Get me a job as a baker!" Actually, I ended up going to school to become a master butcher because baking wasn't available. From there, I went on to become an accomplished chef but I still get stuck with the stripper tag.

**Brutarian:** So what about the European rep proceeding you here and you only getting your Records released overseas at first?

**Nagy:** Oh no, it's just the other way around: our records are finally getting released in Europe and we're just not that popular there. Maybe if we toured more over there, we'd get a bit more recognition but The Cobras aren't going to go begging for success; we'll let it all come to us. Look, it'd be nice to make a ton of money but we're too old to be sleeping on floors in the hope that someone important will notice us and we'll break big. That's why we haven't toured Europe extensively: the promoters want us to play for free. Or next to nothing. Fuck that noise. Let it come to us, that's how it happened with Diet Coke and our "Cha Cha Twist." Coke came to us. We weren't out there peddling our song.

**Brutarian:** Now you mentioned that you and Mary are the constants in the band but you weren't originally a part of it.

**Nagy:** No, I wasn't. I was just singing to myself in the clubs where I watched bands play and the strip joint where I worked and Mary and the band were looking for a vocalist and kept asking me. I couldn't sing. Never sung professionally in my life but you know I partied with them and they fed me drinks, beers, coaxed me and finally I just agreed to do it.

**Brutarian:** So are you happy with where you are now as a singer?

**Nagy:** I'm getting nearer to where I want to be but it's still hard to listen to myself on the discs even though the Cobras and I were happy with the vocal track at the time. And then I'm performing live and I'll do a song and know I really hit it, so much more so then on the recording and I'll say, "God damn, why didn't I do it like that when I was in the studio"?

**Brutarian:** So why not a live album then? The Cobras are very much a wired, live act.

**Nagy:** Well, thank you for that but remember in the studio you can do a helluva lot of things you can't do on stage: background vocals

and harmonies and overlaid tracks. And you can work things out that you can't necessarily do on stage.

**Brutarian:** The few originals, like "Hot Dog" on the new disc, Baby, sound like the old stuff. Why don't you and the band compose more?

**Nagy:** Well, it's like what I said about The Stones. About setting the bar really high. We're performing great material, classics really, and when you're going up against that, you just want to be really careful. It's the highest praise to have you say that you thought it was something we'd found on one

of our old records in our LP collection. And it is nice to know that we can do it but a whole disc of Cobra's originals? Don't think so. When you think about it, what does it matter anyway? You love us, you love what we're doing and you're hearing some great stuff you've never heard before.

#### SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Mink Rat or Rabbit (1998)  
Life, Love & Leaving (2001)  
Seven Easy Pieces EP (2004)  
Baby (2005)

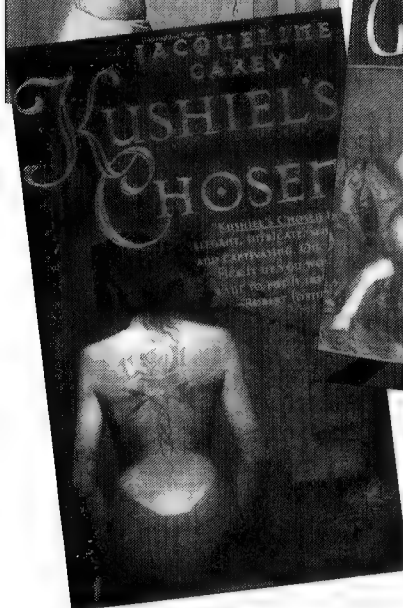
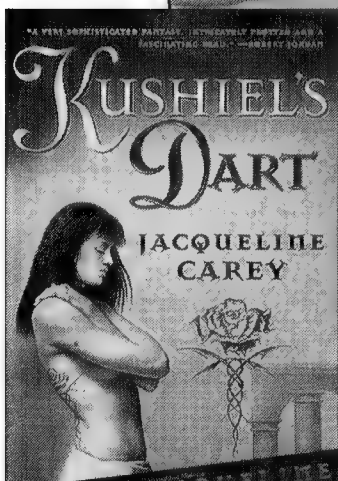


(Photo by Doug Coombe)



# An Interview With Jacqueline Carey

By  
Jayme Lynn  
Blaschke



New York Times best-selling fantasist Jacqueline Carey was hailed as an overnight sensation when her novel *Kushiel's Dart* was published in 2001--ironic, since the ten years prior she'd spent struggling

to get into print certainly seemed more substantial than "overnight" to her. Following

the success of her debut novel, Carey returned to that intense, sensual setting with *Kushiel's Chosen* in 2002 and *Kushiel's Avatar* in 2003, earning more fans and critical praise in the process. Her most recent is *Banewrecker: Volume One of The Sundering*, with volume two, *Godslayer*, scheduled for publication in 2005.

Carey lives in Michigan, where she is currently working on a new trilogy set in the same world as her *Kushiel* novels.

\*\*\*

You're a couple of years removed from the publication of *Kushiel's Avatar*. Do you



*find yourself missing those characters, that setting?*

\*\*\*

I'm actually quite a bit further removed. I had completed it at least a year prior to publication. There was a long period of down time between the sale of the trilogy and the release of *Kushiel's Dart*--about two and a half years of down time. I was reasonably close to having finished *Avatar* at the time *Dart* was released, and then began working on something else.

That said, yeah, I did find myself really missing them.

\*\*\*

*What's it like for you to be finished with a project that took up such a large part of your life?*

\*\*\*

I always feel, at the end of each book--and most especially at the end of *Avatar*--there's a tremendous sense of loss and emptiness. I think every writer responds differently to finishing a project, let alone finishing a major project. I have heard of

others who go through something almost like post-partum depression. I have to admit that I actually cried while writing the final scene of *Avatar*, just because it *was* the conclusion of three massive tomes and so much psychological travail on the part of the characters--but I had to go there, too.

\*\*\*

*Do you anticipate ever revisiting the world of Kushiel in future works?*

\*\*\*

Yeah. That's actually in the works. Anyone who's thinking they might want to read the trilogy, or has read one of the books but hasn't finished it--this might be something of a spoiler, because it's a continuation with one of the secondary characters, who will now take over as protagonist.

\*\*\*

*This would be the new Imriel trilogy?*

\*\*\*

Mmm-hmm. It's technically untitled--Imrielisthecharacter's

name. I've just been calling it the "Imriel Trilogy."

\*\*\*

Do you plan on taking it a different direction than the *Kushiel* novels, or can readers expect the Imriel books to hold a similar flavor?

\*\*\*

Both. Both similar and different. It's similar in that it will be revisiting familiar characters and familiar settings as well as incorporating new ones. It will have still the dark, decadent, lush tone.

It's different in that, I think, these books are going to be a little more intimate in scale. My point of view is that you can only save the world--at least the same one--so many times without it beginning to ring false. This is a character who comes with an innate set of baggage that is just massive. Huge internal conflicts from the get-go. That's his backstory, so that psychological arc is going to be the main thrust--which is not to say there won't be lots of

action as well, but not quite on the "World is in jeopardy once again," level.

\*\*\*

*Where are you in the writing process? First book?*

\*\*\*

First book, yes. That's because I had another project I was working on in between the two.

\*\*\*

*Why did you choose to set the Kushiel novels in an alternate history as opposed to a secondary fantasy world?*

\*\*\*

Honestly, it wasn't wholly a conscious decision. I really like reading the sort of alternate history that has been dubbed "cafeteria style." Selecting bits here and there. I always thought of it myself as a "Signposts in the mist" approach to alternate history. I guess it's sort of an intellectual puzzle when you spot (the signposts) and go, "Ah! I know that! That's real, that is. Los Arrianismo actually is a name of Venice. Uh-huh, I knew that!" It's just something that really appeals to me as a reader, and I found myself setting out to do it as a writer.

\*\*\*

*How much research was involved in your worldbuilding?*

\*\*\*

Quite a bit. Some research I did up front, then once I got under way, it was sort of a rolling process where I found myself scrambling to get research done before I got to a destination.

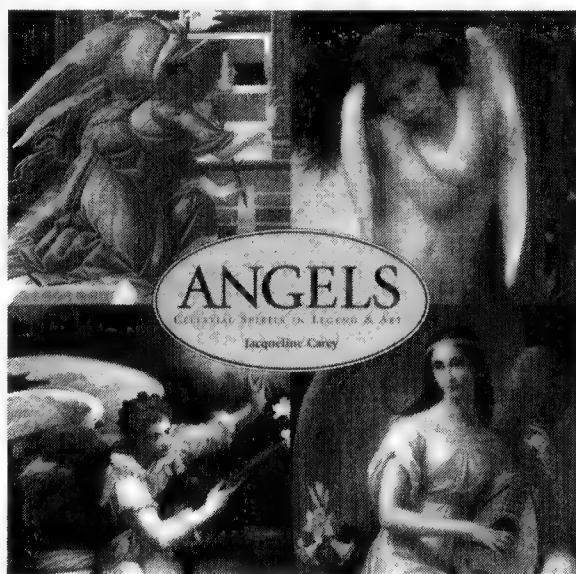
I'll have an idea what I want to do, but I need to find those little visceral details that ground it. When I'm doing historical fantasy in the "signposts in the mist" approach, I don't want to get too hung up on being accurate. I still have to do the research, but then allow myself to forget it a little bit, and

reinvent on my own.

Sometimes it shows, and sometimes it doesn't. I did a crazy amount of research into theater--medieval and renaissance theatre in *Chosen*--and I used one tiny detail. But I needed to do it so that I was grounded and could pick that one detail that could bring that scene to life.

\*\*\*

*Did you ever come across particularly fascinating facts or details that you really wanted to*



*use, but couldn't make work in the story?*

\*\*\*

One of my favorite research sources was this great book of 18th Century travel writing. A British doctor and his wife--it was written by the doctor--traveling in Ethiopia, following some of the lesser tributaries of the Nile. I did draw a lot on the descriptions from that. I like to go back to source material as old as I can find. They're just more vivid and it frees you up more for a fantastic approach. There was some stuff in there that was hysterically funny--but reflective very much of the colonial attitude that I didn't want to incorporate. He was a very funny colonial.

\*\*\*

*How much did your nonfiction book, Angels: Celestial Spirits in Art and Legend, influence the novels?*

\*\*\*

It played a big role in shaping the theology. I'd already had the novels in mind. They hadn't all coalesced, but I knew this was sort of an arena where I wanted to play. Then I got the opportunity to do this book on commission. I thought, "Well, it's work for hire. The money's not great, but I'd be paid for doing research." So I took it and did it, and a lot of that did end up finding its way into the theology, which is part and parcel of the plot.

\*\*\*

*You mentioned the theology--how much do your own theological beliefs influence and shape what goes on in the books?*

\*\*\*

There's not a real direct correlation there, honestly. I refer to myself as a "zen pantheist." I'm fascinated by mythology in general, because it's story infused with faith, and I find that really intriguing.

\*\*\*

*Why did you choose to develop an alternate version of the Judeo-Christian religious tradition, as opposed to, say, inventing a new one?*

\*\*\*

Because so much of what I was doing with the mythos *does* have its roots in Judeo-Christian writing. I mean, it's pretty much the same question as, "Why go with an alternate history." I find it interesting to see what other writers do, and what other weird variations there are. In fact, the Yeshuaites-- I looked at Messianic Judaism, which is an existing religion today, and pretty much took their tenants straight from what is a very small splinter offshoot of Christianity and Judaism. And





again, that was one of the more discernable "What ifs." I just thought it was a very interesting question.

\*\*\*

*Have you gotten any feedback from fans on the religious aspects of the books?*

\*\*\*

Nothing that comes to mind, in dramatic terms. I haven't had anybody ream me out for blasphemy, which I'm pleased to relate. Mostly, it's been, "I thought that was really cool the way you did that," or, "What's the source of that story?"

\*\*\*

*The trilogy got you on the New York Times' bestseller list, so you became an "overnight sensation" after spending a decade in the role of struggling writer. Do you believe those years of adversity made you a better writer today?*

\*\*\*

I absolutely do. It's one of those things that if someone had said to me around year seven of futile struggle, "Someday, you're going to be glad it took

this long," I would've *laughed* in their faces. But the truth is, it made me a better writer because I kept pushing myself, and saying, "Okay, the next one. Work harder, write better. Work harder, write better." It was when I really allowed myself to take a risk with *Kushiel's Dart* that my work took a huge leap in quality.

Who knows? I could've struck it lucky with an earlier work if the stars had been aligned differently. But probably not, because it *wasn't* as good. I don't know if I ever would've pushed myself to get to this level if I had.

\*\*\*

*How many novels had you written prior to Kushiel's Dart?*

\*\*\*

Three.

\*\*\*

*Any chance of you ever revisiting these, or are they trunked now and forever?*

\*\*\*

Pretty doubtful. At this point, I'm not thinking they'll

see the light of day.

\*\*\*

*Are they fantasy novels, too?*

\*\*\*

One was fantasy. One was soft science fiction. And one was completely mainstream.

\*\*\*

*What is the origin of the tattoo? It has become synonymous with your work, obviously, but where did the idea originate?*

\*\*\*

Boy, when was the tattoo craze? At its height in the 90s, I thought about getting a tattoo, but I never could decide what I would get, or where. One day, I thought, "You know, if I do it, I just want to go all the way out and do a full spinal piece." And I didn't. Instead, I wrote it into a book.

That's one of those ideas where I can't remember if the reason for it came first, or the "You know what'd be really cool?" came first. I said, as I was writing the book and going through the agent hunting process, "If it sell, man, if it sells, I'm *doing*

it! I'm getting a tattoo!" And indeed, when it ended up being the breakthrough book, I said, "I'm *not* doing it!" [laughing] In part, that's because when you write a first-person novel with a provocative female protagonist, everybody's going to ask, "How much of you is in your heroine?" For me, getting the tattoo would be sending a message I *didn't* intend. So I got my belly pierced instead.

\*\*\*

*Good compromise there! Does it surprise you how iconic the tattoo has become?*

\*\*\*

It does. It's one of those things where I thought, "Somebody's going to do it. There's going to be someone out there who goes and gets the tattoo." But I didn't expect *so many*! I didn't expect it to acquire that "iconic quality" as you say, and just become representative. People tell me sometimes why they've done it, and it's always for different reasons. Different things in the book struck a chord with them, but they all focus on that as the symbol.

\*\*\*

*Your books have an intense sexuality to them, and this is reflected by the cover art. Have you suffered any backlash from this? Have you been--dare I say it--banned?*

\*\*\*

Not that I'm aware of, which doesn't mean it hasn't happened. Although there is one thing that does kind of sadden me about that. "Operation Paperback" sends books to troops stationed overseas. You can't send books that have any kind of cover nudity to Afghanistan or to Iraq, so I feel kind of left out. That's something I would gladly contribute to. I can send other books, but not my own.

I know some people have had strong reactions to them, but I was really surprised by the lack of reaction in my community.

I live in a very conservative area. I was all braced: *Here comes the controversy!* These are people who tried to get *Harry Potter* banned because of "Satanic elements," so I'm saying, "Wait 'til *mine* comes out!" And my books got media coverage, a couple of write-ups. "It's coming," I thought . . . but nothing. I did try to be very clear in doing interviews with the media, that yes, there is a dark, erotic component in these books that is not for children. I guess it worked too well.

\*\*\*

*How do you feel to be thrust into the role of champion, the public voice of the B&D, S&M sub-culture?*

\*\*\*

I think certainly there are other nonfiction books and erotica that deal with it in far more hands-on, candid and factual ways than my books. I think elements of S&M, B&D, D&S--whatever acronym you choose to use--have been present in popular culture. They're prevalent everywhere, and they're seldom presented with any kind of responsibility. One of the things I wanted to do was make sure it *was* presented responsibly. Consentuality is a sacred tenant in Angelyne culture, just because I felt it was really important to treat this topic with respect and integrity, and make it clear that there are lines.

\*\*\*

*To an extent, the books can be viewed as feminist writing, but some people view the courtesan as being at odds with feminism. Did you consider this perceived conflict while writing the books?*

\*\*\*

Yeah, definitely. My first and foremost thought was, "Can I do this in a way that is not sensational and exploitative?" That was the challenge. And then, if I think I can actually pull it off, is it worth doing? Are

there reasons of merit?

The "woman as victim" trope is another thing that is so prevalent, and I wanted to invert that. Yeah, Phaedra is a submissive, but only in terms of pleasure. In terms of personality, not so much. The two are not mutually exclusive. She is a character who very much owns her own sexuality, and in that sense, I think she is a feminist role model, in a very peculiar way. She is someone who refuses to be victimized, or to accept that status. I also like the fact that she has no special magic abilities, no supernatural powers. She's smart and she's good in bed, but mostly, she just *never gives up*.

The flip side to inverting that cliché, I gave her a romantic male foil who is bound and determined that he wants to stay celibate to get across the point that his rigidity breaks before her flexibility does. They both grow through the process. I was not sure how a "wanting to be chaste" hero would go over, but he's got his own estrogen posse.

\*\*\*

*Laurel K. Hamilton has been stalked by readers, and now requires security on hand when she makes public appearances. You don't write the same kind of book she does, but there is a degree of overlap. Has this been a concern for you?*

\*\*\*

I've been asked this more and more, and I really feel I need to find wood to knock on every time. So far, it hasn't been an issue. By and large, the fans I've met have been very cool, and very respectful. I take precautionary measures--not having a listed phone number, all that--but I've been fortunate, and all I can say is I hope that continues.

\*\*\*

*Your latest book is the epic fantasy Banewrecker, and*

*the follow-up coming in 2005 is Godslayer. What was the inspiration for writing an epic fantasy from the villain's point of view?*

\*\*\*

It's just one of those things that feels to me like a big old softball idea that's been hanging in the air waiting for someone to smack it. I know it's been done in parody and satire. Probably one of the reasons it's challenging to do it in a straightforward manner is that you really have to write an epic fantasy that references other works in the structure of the story in ways that are obvious to the informed reader. You can't do a *The Wind Done Gone* because you're not going to be protected by satire rules. Again, I like that idea of taking tropes and inverting them. And this is a big one.

\*\*\*

*How was the writing experience on these books different from writing the Kushiel trilogy?*

\*\*\*

It was a really massive shift, which I knew it would be. I wanted to challenge and try and stretch myself. It's funny, because I did not work extensively in the first person throughout my struggling years. I never really thought I liked it all that much, but the idea for *Kushiel* came and there it was. Then I spent years immersed in one character's voice, and to go from 21,000 pages of first person to a multiple, third-person point of view--that was a huge shift. And then I was also dealing with multiple plot threads that had to run parallel--not fray or break--then intertwine, re-weave. That happens in the *Kushiel* books, but it's all filtered through one consciousness, which just seems to make it easier. All I needed to worry about was what Phaedra knew and when she knew it. The rest was sort of on the sideline, so it was really

different to have to worry about getting that pacing and timing.

With *Banewreaker*, it's really telling the story from both sides. I remember watching "The Fellowship of the Ring" when they're in the mines of Moria and thinking "How'd those orcs all get there anyway? What about provisions? What are they eating? Cannibalism? What's the rate of attrition?" You don't have to worry about that, do you? Well, I do.

\*\*\*

*Did you originally approach Banewreaker and Godslayer as a two-book series?*

\*\*\*

No, they were a single book. It was pretty massive, pushing the limits of what I had done before in a single book. Then it grew some more in the editing process, and my editor at Tor pointed out, "You know, we just crunched the numbers and it's too big." There's precedent. Tolkien, who started this, conceived of *The Lord of the Rings* as a single book, so it's weirdly appropriate.

\*\*\*

*Are you happy with the final versions?*

\*\*\*

Yes, I am. I would've been happy if we could've kept it to a single volume, but it just wasn't doable. Everything that was added strengthened the books. I would rather have a strong duology than a weaker stand alone.

\*\*\*

*It lends itself to being split into two volumes, then?*

\*\*\*

It does. There is a major breaking point in the action, and we break after "Act 1" is resolved and "Act 2" is pending.

\*\*\*

*As a writer, what can you do now that you couldn't do when you were starting out?*

\*\*\*

My first thought is, "Go to

the grocery store, any time of the day I want to." (laughing) But that's probably not really the direction you meant!

There are so many things I've learned along the way. The mainstream novel I wrote had five people and not a lot of action. It taught me, if nothing else, how to handle dialogue in a fluid fashion. One of the biggest things I think writers need to learn as they go is the power of restraint--what's not said, what's not over-described. I've learned to trust my strengths and tried to hone my weaknesses.

It's hard. There's no one big thing. Hopefully you just continue to grow and learn and improve, and continue to challenge yourself.

-XXX-

**MR. BAD VIBES'  
NEIGHBORHOOD**

**Gene Gregorits**



## Breaking The Ice

FLASH: New York City, six years ago-

Early in the day, an ex-quasi-girlfriend phoned me up. I'd told her about the fight.

"Why are you doing this, Gene?"

"Do you want to watch?"

"Answer my question. When did this new act of yours start, exactly? You weren't violent when I knew you."

"You didn't stick around very long, I guess: I'm in a transitional phase." It was still some kind of record. Two weeks. That meant she had a stronger will than most others. She kept me from misbehaving during that time. I don't know what that meant, or how she did it.

"You think it's funny. Don't you realize you could get seriously hurt, or even killed?"

"Yeah, so?"

"Forget it, I hope you do wind up with all your teeth knocked out. I'm sure it'll make you very happy. Then you can just finish yourself off."

"Is that reverse psychology?"

"Don't expect me to come see you in the hospital. If you want to behave like an animal, and wind up even more brain damaged than you are...or worse, with a disease...you know, I read your last column in the The New York Waste. Did you really drink that girl's..."

"Yeah. It turned you on, right?"

"You're disgusting."

"You oughta know," I said with a belch.

She hung up.

Now, I am streaked with blood, shaking uncontrollably both from subzero temperature and contusions. The

damage isn't too bad but this weather makes pain seem worse than it is. I am intensely amused.

When it was over, we shared a cab. Dirk gets off not far from the Chinatown alleyway we left splashed with my blood, and a little of his, perhaps.

The cab continues on to the bridge and then across it.....before we get there, I have him stop the cab.....I lean through the plexiglass partition. "How do I look?"

He turns on the light.

"Is there much bleeding?" I ask.

"Some cuts....your nose....yeah. A fight?"

"Yeah but we straightened things out, don't worry. Take this next right."

Dirk knew the moves, suave, he'd been practicing the last week. I didn't concern myself with the imminent battle. It was simply a pleasant sensation to know it would happen, it was a kick, to have been asked out on such a unique engagement. First date in many months, now that I think about it.

He swiveled, poised, taunted, and glared like a real fighter. He shook his fists and projected the ugliness of hatred, and all this showed me he was confident. My best licks were gotten while he already had me in a devastating hold.....as he assailed my ribs, I found his. I couldn't really tell the precision and force of Dirk's punches, although I surely knew they were landing.

But I am getting too far ahead. I told the cabbie all of this, and then moved on to job talk when we were squared off from the next block by a garbage truck.



"So selfish, careless, these trash men. They could have pulled over the truck just, you know, little more, and then we could go ahead. Ah, look at them, they must be freezing, those poor trash guys."

I responded, "But they make good money. At least fifteen an hour an hour, over a hundred a day. They aren't poor."

"Yes, but look at them, doing that. No, that is nothing to do for a living."

This was the coldest night of the year. The men were throwing huge stacks of cardboard and slimy plastic bags in the truck. They did not seem miserable, but they were ugly and wore thick gloves. Their breath exploded in clouds of frost as they ran back and forth, laughing about things I couldn't hear through the noise and the thick window.

I told him to take me to the corner bar. When the cab stopped, I searched both back pockets with my left hand, where I had put my last twenty. It was not there. My right hand, the one which was scraped and wet with red from fingertip to wrist, dove into a pocket again. I seached the jacket, threw my face on to floor pleading for light to be shed upon the rear seat. I gave up the futile search and counted out five ones, collected from various places, all I had left. The fare had ticked up to thirteen dollars. I gave him the five.

Without hesitation, he said, "That's fine. I'm going home now anyway. Now you go home. Okay?"

Leaving the cab, I muttered through chattering, bloody teeth, "Check the seat later....you may find a twenty back there."

I went to the bar, which was not very crowded. Those in this place, a swanky shithole with "house" music, or disco, and morbid lighting, stared at me all the way to my seat. Delectable repulsion. I had fear in me, it worked like good coke, without the need to jaw incessantly. I fed on the sight of blood and near-hypothermia while looking for a familiar bartender, but only knowing one of them, Turkish Randy, my chances were slim. The DJ was at the end of the bar, next to me. Nostrils both caked thick with dark leakage, back aching from at least twenty-five hard blows, I was convulsing. In the worst of circumstances, a beer would suffice and for that I had no money.

The DJ looked at me . . . "You're Gene Suicide."

"Yeah."

He told me his name, which I have since already forgotten again.

"How do you know me?"

"You used to come in a lot. I'm ---."

I apologized for not being able to reciprocate his kind acknowledgement.

"I'm looking for Turkish Randy, he'll front me a beer."

"I'll front you a beer. It's up to me anyway."

"Okay. Well, thanks." This night was too full of good people.

"What are you spinning?" I asked.

"Crappy 70's music, usually."

"What do you like?"

"I like Tom Jones," he said.

I pissed in the ladies room, got walked in on, then finished my beer with some cigarettes, as my entire body shuddered like a diesel engine about to explode into a ball of red hot nothing.

Rewind...

That day I saw Dirk and was met immediately with a cold stand off. I tried to break it.

"Okay, what's this shit? Why won't you look at me when I am talking to you?"

"Looking at the ladies."

"What!? Bullshit."

"I'm in a war mode. I'm getting ready, this is for real, mate. No fucking joke."

"Why all the fuckin hostility? This act is pathetic."

He said nothing, averting his eyes. I asked for a cigarette.

"No."

"Quit acting like such a cunt."

He gave me a cigarette.

Then, still hiding from me, he sneered under his breath, "I'm gonna fuck you up, mate."

We had arrangements to meet at this fetid cesspool-what they call a "sports bar"- called The Dead Marmet Lounge in the meat packing district. I took a cab from work, after buying cigarettes. All night I had been forced to question my lack of nervousness, fearing it would attack me at any minute and reach panic level, leaving me without a fucking chance. Somehow, I couldn't manage to get riled about this. It was an insult to realize that if I wanted to swap blows with someone I could do no better than a petty grudge match with a not-quite nemesis who was bigger than me and a lot meaner. I'm really not a malicious guy you see, but I do feel rather at peace with the ills of my existence when spitting up a mouthfull of blood or causing another to do same. We all have our quirks, after all. I guess I should have explained this to that ex who called. She might have understood me. But I don't speak well on the phone.

So I slid from a cab into the Dead Marmet where I found Dirk sitting tense and alone with a glass of beer. I sat down, and looked at him, then looked away, feeling calm. He asked me what I was drinking. We went to the bar, where he paid. We returned to our small table. Said nothing. Creepy silence. Bluffing in a game of ego I wasn't particularly fond of. Anticipating the action, a sensation of cool, slow dread without fear...I felt acutely satiated

and a subtle queasiness overtook me. Dirk refused to look anywhere in my direction, staring at a girl who'd just walked in.

"Look at that."

"I can't make her out," I said.

"Why? Bad eyes?"

"Yeah. Bad eyes. So you approached me with this, after weeks of me trying to get you to go out. Why now? I'm curious."

"I've been in a bad mood."

"But you're treating this like it's a personal vendetta."

"It is."

"Why?"

"I hate your guts."

"You know, I don't really hate you. I just don't like you. No offense, but you're not worth hating."

"My friends all wanted in on this. They all wanted a piece of you, Gene."

"Hah." I thought a minute on that.

He said, "I saved you for myself. I could have had you jumped you know."

Apparently Dirk had developed an obsessive hatred for me, and his friends must have listened to a bitter monologue or two. Of course, they appropriated the sentiment of their lionized Lothario. I should have been flattered, but the reaction it evoked was one of creepiness. Someone had devoted their own time to a discussion in which I was slandered. My feeble, unpleasant aura had been trashed by persons unknown. I guess some people just have far too much time on their hands, or they're just very good at wasting it. Nevertheless, it seemed a good reason to have another lock put on the door. These people might be dangerous thugs. Who knew?

"Steve, you talk so much shit about violence and death and we laugh at you."

"It's nice to know I'm thought of."

"Why don't you just go through with it already."

"I keep hearing that. It almost hurts my feelings."

"People tend to think you're a bully", he added.

"Yeah, that makes perfect sense. No, the truth is that you're a bully. You're the one who thrives on intimidation tactics and condescension. Why not admit it?"

Dirk held court for another beer, and stopped baiting me. Talk about fight practicalities began again....where? And what was off limits? Dirk said, "Nothing. And if you get me down, finish me off. I'll do the same if I beat you."

We got a cab, and our search began in Chinatown. In less than a minute, we were listening to our own moans and whimpers from the wind's ferocious bite. Seven or ten degrees, with constant gales of sub-zero chill factor. Every place we went to, Dirk would say, with increasing

agitation, "Snow covered" or "Ice" or "Too much visibility." He was right, being unprepared to jump into it anywhere, making our midnight melee into a bust waiting to happen.

We tried squeezing into the gates of private parking lots. We examined sub-street level hallways. We canvassed Chinatown from one end to the other: commercial garages, parks, alleys, administration buildings, small plots of land. We prowled the concrete corridors of strange institutes. Muttering, bitter, in pure agony, but neither one of us would give in. We were off to fight, Dirk concerned with matters of ego while I grappled with feelings of enthusiasm and disbelief and an inexorable masochistic glee driving me onward through the fog.

Then we reached a place, on the eastern outskirts of Chinatown, before it stretched out into the deepest recesses of the lower East Side, towards the financial district. This alley was the oddest thus far.....narrow and curving at a 180 degree angle on to Canal Street. Hidden, almost. Good enough.

Dirk didn't like the surface conditions at first.

"It's iced over."

"No it's not. Only a little snow. We can use it."

I soon came to understand one thing: Dirk's fists were swift and threatening as claw hammers, dropping and dancing in well balanced patterns. I felt my balls tighten. I was petrified. It felt good.

He lunged and I lunged back but his fists always hit first. The earliest swings broke my lips and gums and I doubled back, away, as would be repeated countless times during the next twenty minutes. I knew I was bleeding, despite the ruthless cold that had long since numbed my flesh. It was getting hard to see, I was disoriented. I wiped on my sweatshirt several times. It darkened, and before long he was at me again, getting his shots in, and I found he was good at holds, during which our punches connected simultaneously, bruising back and ribs. Dirk was good on his feet, and could get me down with little trouble, but I willed myself to hit back hard enough when it felt like life or death. His locks were virtually inescapable.

We parted just in time as a man approached with a squeaky pushcart of fruit. A breathless voice announced, "We've got company." He was keeping his cool, I'd already lost mine.

The second bout commenced. I got caught in several grips, his punches placing me in a pathetic defensive edginess. Out of breath, and considerably smaller in stature than the feral, bloodthirsty aggressor, my not-so-very-deft struggles to fix a foot behind one of his, to trip him into the ice all were cut short either by the strength of his hold or the sharpness of the fists.

My face was in the street, grinding into the ice, as I whipped and flailed around like a harpooned fish.

A backswing got me away and to my feet. He was immediately upon me again with another row of knuckles to my lower jaw. When I couldn't hold him off any more, I knew my face would be open to him finally, and I'd be spitting teeth; even then he would not relent. So instead of the frail, flaccid footsy action I had been attempting to use on this mad dog, I simply gripped his midsection and pushed with every burst of fierceness I had left. He released and recoiled, as his teeth had begun to close on my right ear. His eyes burned into mine, in harmony with the rivulets of wetness which dribbled from my nose and mouth. This was exactly what was supposed to happen. Dirk wanted to win, being a competitive sort. It didn't make much difference to me either way. The important thing was to get through it with my teeth, or most of them, intact.

Adrenalin rarified the intake of breath and any possible awareness of anything but pain...and defeat. He came in again, as I ducked. Rearing back once, as the jabs returned, I let a right fly out and suddenly there was a blink in my vision, like radio static, transmission failure from a low flying plane. Mouth agape, my head rolled back and I looked up at the sky for a second. Vision returned. And then I saw Dirk. He was now face down in the snow, in this pit of brick and tundra and garbage, and struggling to regain footing. I leaped to his sprawled out frame and hammered him from behind, deep pounds, desperate trounces meant to keep him down for a while. Closing time.

Dirk reversed his position and began to thrust forward. I aimed another right which struck his bare skull soundly on the temple, this one sending me off in a combination of pain and sorrow.

Dirk hauled himself up. I rushed back.

"Are you okay?"

He was dazed but became lucid quickly.

"Yeah."

The cold was worse than ever now. I piss-moaned over my fists, which no longer responded to nerve commands. Dirk offered me a cigarette. I took it and went to the other side of the alley to light up. With both hands.

The Camel tasted good in my torn and bleeding mouth. I stood there, watching him smoke. Waiting for him to take his black gloves off, throw the cigarette down and motion that he was ready to go in again.

He didn't, and instead stiffly slid his jacket over his arms and we watched each other another minute. A car was coming.

"Look lively, Gene", he said.

I repeated the words three or four times before I knew what they meant. The car rolled by, and Dirk started out of the alley.

"It's too cold."

"You want to stop?" I stammered with false indignation.

"We'll get back to this when it's warmer."

We shook hands.

Back in Brooklyn, after leaving the bar, wind whistling and tormenting nerve ends, I could not find my keys. The keys to my apartment, my job, my very existence. If I had lost them, I would freeze to death. I trembled, and in a trance found myself at a cab stand.

"I need a car to Manhattan." Two Dominicans stared at me in mutual loathing, for the harsh neon lighting brought out my bleeding face and hands. I started to tell them that I didn't have any money, and I couldn't even remember where the fucking alley was, but my keys had slipped out there along with that 20. A rescue/recovery mission...I had to take a shot at it. I'd give my wallet as collateral. They stared, saying nothing. I reached into a jeans leg without thinking and there, at the bottom, were the keys after all.

"Heh heh. It was a...uh...nevermind."

I bowed out, disappeared.

And made it in, laughing as I uncorked a bottle of four dollar champagne and sat down to take it easy awhile. There wasn't any other preoccupation to exploit.

Except just being warm. That created much appreciation for the hour of repose, in which I got very drunk, and hence, forgot to wash the blood and alley filth off my body.

I found a porno rag under the sink. It was very wet, and half done in by the boric acid I'd poured around last month, because of more fucking roaches. There was one in my wine last week. I found it about a second too late. I felt the thing moving around inside, then spat, puked in the tub. Gargled with rubbing alcohol. Puked again. Always a scene.

The woman on the cover of the skin rag was way too skinny and she had moles on her back, lots of them.

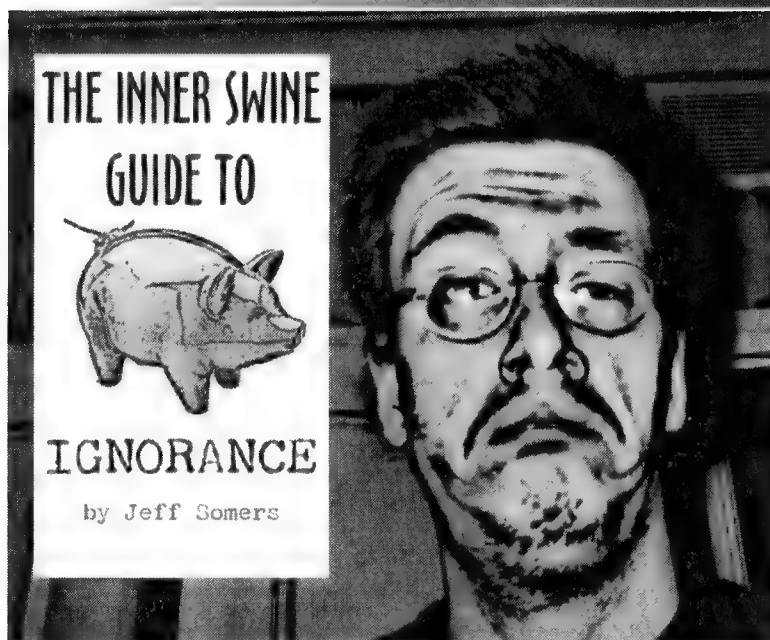
I started to count her moles, and fell asleep sitting up.

Dreaming of a sane and civil life, somewhere else, away from roaches, psychic vampires like Dirk, and too many gutless goddamn critics. Alone in my Brooklyn kitchen, in love with the five hundred and sixty seven women who call me dogshit with their eyes, every night, any night.

Mr. Bad Vibes Neighborhood, U Sayy-yaaaay-yaaaaay.

Ya-men.

(Dedicated to Lee Elms)



## Episode One: JUST PEANUTS TO SPACE

FOLKS, this is the tale of truly breathtaking ignorance. My ignorance. I know what you're thinking. You're thinking, *Jeff, how can a hip zine publisher around whom at least four known cargo cults have formed be ignorant?* The answer, friends, is simple: I simply haven't been paying attention.

People have tried to educate me. They've tried to inform me. Wise men and women have occasionally taken me aside and tried to impart some wisdom to me. Failing that, they've tried to beat some sense into me. In each case, I have nodded politely and placed a serious, dour expression my face<sup>1</sup>, thanked them for their interest, and forgotten whatever it was they had to say within moments of skipping away, probably in search of beer. Time after time, my would-be educators have failed, leaving me just as dull and ignorant as ever; perhaps more so, depending on the quality of their company and how dubious their wisdom was.

The great thing about modern society—or at least modern American society, which is the only society I am even slightly qualified to comment on—is that it is designed to be more or less idiot-proof. Ignorance will not kill you, usually, in modern day America, which staves off the claws of evolution

long enough for someone like me to mature into an adult and wreak havoc. In prior eras, I would have been killed and consumed by wild animals within years of my birth, most probably running towards the killer beasts with a smile on my face, completely ignorant of the potential dangers. Thanks to society having formed around me like a protective chrysalis, however, I remain alive, despite knowing virtually nothing worth knowing.

Too many writers and columnists use their soapbox to try and look smart. It's easy, after all; you can do research and feign all sorts of knowledge<sup>2</sup>. I could have made the subject of this column String Theory, and spent a few months reading up on it—or, to be honest, a few hours cutting and pasting from web pages—and made it seem that I was knowledgeable and well-read. It's entirely possible that every columnist and writer in the world is a moron like me, faking it. So I have come to a decision: This column will be about ignorance. I will be unflinching in my exploration of my own stupidity. I will be the one columnist in the world who flaunts his ignorance, who says, "Yes! I am sadly uninformed, frequently drunk, and often at a loss as to the location of my pants!"<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Actually the same expression I use for pants-wetting fear, which gets me into no end of trouble.

<sup>2</sup> I do this every day. It's how I've remained employed for more than a decade.

<sup>3</sup> This is an overused in-joke from my zine. It will be over-used here as well, until you decide it's funny from sheer insane repetition. I am a genius.



First, I think it's important to take a quick tour of the knowledge I do possess, so we can dispose of the subject and get on with the major work of covering everything I *don't* know.

### JEFF'S KNOWLEDGE

How much liquor I can drink on an empty stomach without throwing up.

Approximately twelve guitar chords.  
One chess opening.

Enough French to mispronounce about six sentences.

Every lyric to every *Iron Maiden* and *AC/DC* song ever<sup>4</sup>.

And that's about it. Not very impressive, you'll agree, and not very useful—is it any wonder I drink myself senseless every night? It's the shame, I tell you<sup>5</sup>.

How did this happen? I had a decent education<sup>6</sup>. I had caring teachers who sometimes noticed me sitting there with the vaguely anxious expression I am known for on my face and tried to inflict knowledge on me. The schools I attended had good facilities and valued academic performance. My parents, beleaguered as they were by my tendency to get trapped down wells and lured away by strangers on the street offering to sign me to multiyear recording contracts, encouraged me—indeed, my brother Yan<sup>7</sup> is so smart he is often impossible to talk to, his vocabulary apparently including several words that won't be invented for years<sup>8</sup>. So how did I manage to squeak into adulthood with a working knowledge of almost nothing except several elaborate and detailed imaginary worlds, of which I am invariably king?

The simple answer is, we live in a world where you pretty much don't need to know anything. Or at least a world where middle-class people in first-world countries don't need to know anything. There was

probably a time where a lack of knowledge—whether of your environs, your past, or your neighbors—resulted in your immediate painful death, but those times are gone, at least for people like me living in New Jersey in 2005. You simply don't need to know anything in order to survive—all the sharp edges and pointy things have been covered up by a thick protective layer of government and social services<sup>9</sup>. You can easily coast from birth to natural death in this world with nothing more than basic speech skills and a winning smile. And I sure do have a winning smile.

However it happened, here I am, fully grown and suddenly vaguely alarmed at the whistling emptiness in my data banks. I can do one of two things in response to this epiphany. One, I could attempt to educate myself and pull myself out of this chasm of darkness. Two, I could wallow in my ignorance for the entertainment value my dimwitted adventures afford you, the good people of The Earth. I believe this is really not a choice at all, that the only possible way forward is the latter, because the Universe is just too big.

I'll never be able to learn about everything there is in the universe. I'll never even manage to learn about everything in the universe that my fellow men—brighter and more energetic than me—have cataloged and explored, which is a deplorably small data set in itself. As the saying goes, the universe is big. You just won't believe how vastly, hugely, mind- bogglingly big it is. I mean, you may think it's a long way down the road to the chemist's, but that's just peanuts to space<sup>10</sup>. There might have been a time in history when a man might aspire to being a Renaissance Man, back when the list of human knowledge was much smaller and simply being able to perform simple algebraic equations made you a mathematical genius—but those days, sadly, have passed<sup>11</sup>, and I for one barely passed pre-calculus in high school, so no Nobel Prizes in mathematics

<sup>4</sup> This means I also know the lyrics to every *Hayseed Dixie* song ever, as well.

<sup>5</sup> And, of course, the shakes.

<sup>6</sup> Including daily beatings by Jesuit priests in high school.

<sup>7</sup> Not his real name. People always get upset when I use their real names in my writing, so I make up ridiculous ones like "Yan" instead.

<sup>8</sup> It's possible that this should really read "words that I won't learn for years" but determining whether words actually exist or not would require soul-numbing research, so let's assume Yan is using words he learns when he time-travels to the future and then back again.

<sup>9</sup> Unless, of course, a hurricane hits your city, in which case you are fucked.

<sup>10</sup> Stolen shamelessly from Douglas Adams, of course, who sadly is no longer in any position to challenge me.

<sup>11</sup> Unless you live in Kansas, in which case just knowing that something called *algebra* exists makes you a Super Genius.

for me<sup>12</sup>. Since any feeble attempt by me to learn about it is doomed from the start, I have no choice but to choose the road more traveled, and simply try to eke out some minor entertainment value from my ignorance, which I will do here in this space. Since I can throw a dart at any encyclopedia and hit something I know nothing about, I shouldn't lack for material.

Until next time then, consider your own

ignorance—the things you use every day whose inner workings, origin, and manufacture are complete mysteries to you, the places and people in the world whose motives, language, and bizarre appearance fill you with worry and dismay, the mystery of where the food you're eating actually comes from and what has to happen to it before you can pop it in your mouth and hum in satisfaction. Then, come back to read my next column, and I'll dance for you. . .even though you can't really see me dancing.

<sup>12</sup> My ignorance is so deep I am not even sure if there is actually a Nobel Prize in "mathematics" or if it goes under some other name, perhaps "Nobel Prize in Numerology" or "Nobel Prize in Rain Manology" or something. I *could* go to the library. . .so far away. . .or type something into Google and check. . .so sleepy. . .

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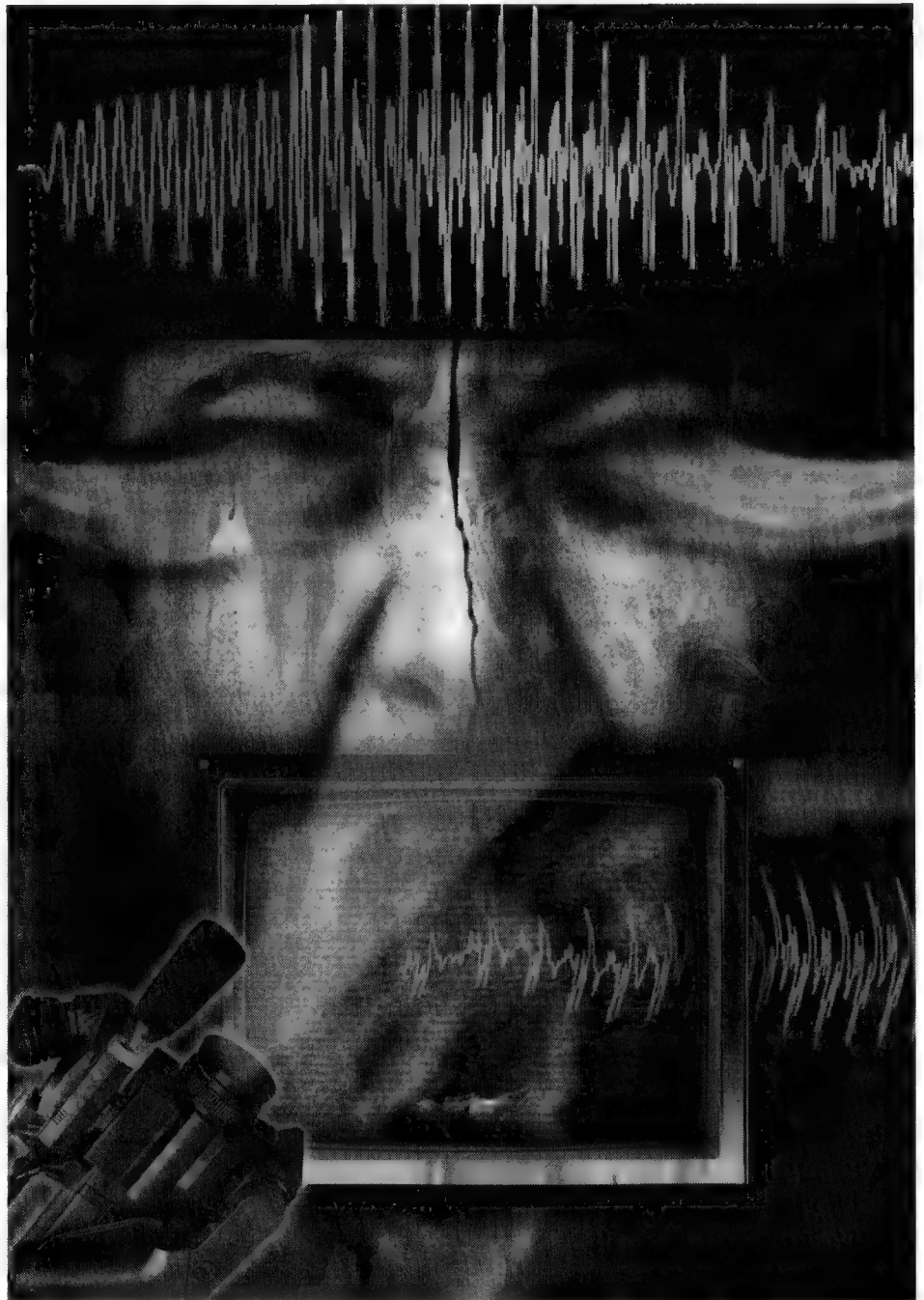
**NIGHTMARE KINETICS**

Miko@eyesofchaos.com

# Sometimes They Talk Back

By Gerard Houarner

When she discovered there was no orange juice in the refrigerator, Regina wrote a note reminding herself to pick up more and left it under the pineapple-shaped kitchen magnet. She waved her finger at the appliance, saying, "And don't let me forget!" She returned to her stool and the bowl of Count Chocula cereal and coffee on the counter, listening to the coffee-maker gurgle and the fan in the next building's window rattle. "I know, it's going to be hot and sticky and awful. But Mister Air Conditioner isn't coming back from the repairman. He's dead. And I can't afford a new one. Not at summer prices." The fan thrummed, coffee maker sputtered. Regina slammed the coffee cup down hard on the formica top. "NO! I am not too damned cheap to pay for the replacement parts. Mister Air Conditioner was very old. He came from my mother's house. You all know how long ago she died, so you can imagine



how old Mister Air Conditioner was when I got him. He might have sounded spry and gay, but inside he was just a rotting mass of machinery. So let's not shed too many tears for him, all right? We'll just have to sweat through the rest of this summer. I'll buy a new one at pre-season prices, and we'll have a party to welcome the new baby into the house next Spring. And that's the last word on that subject."

The fan settled into a rhythmic knocking. The coffee-maker choked itself into silence. In the studio's main room, the weather channel's whisper of muzak jazz took on an ominous tone. Regina suspected the TV, cable box and VCR of harboring secrets: a new episode of *I Love Lucy* guest starring Frank Sinatra and Ella Fitzgerald; an unlisted noir movie featuring Lake, Mitchum, Lupino, Garfield, Tierney, Douglas, Stanwyck, Widmark, Scott, on one of the local access channels; videotapings of her sessions with the electric massager she kept underneath the bathroom sink. But she was already late for work and could not spare the time for a confrontational cataloguing of video tapes or a rigorous surfing through channels. If the electronics and appliances wanted to whisper among themselves about what a bitch she was, like her first graders when she turned her back on them to write on the board, then let them. She gave up on breakfast and threw her cup and bowl into the sink.

She picked out the dark blue sleeveless dress from the studio's single closet, then stuck a post-it note on the apartment door to remind herself to pick up the dry cleaning. She chose the Rockports over the New Balance cross-trainers and headed for the bathroom to put on lip stick and make-up, romantic visions in Spicy Cinnamon springing up to dance through her mind. She still had a nice figure, and the auburn coloring hid the grey as advertised. The creams and powder had done wonders for the skin around her eyes. Someday her prince would come and she would be ready, even if the other teachers called her the Bride of Frankenstein, and the little monsters, zombie bitch, behind her back. At least the appliances spared her their judgements.

The phone rang. Her heart jumped. She stopped in the middle of the studio, glancing at the unmade couch bed, the pile of laundry, magazines and books scattered across the powder blue rug. The phone rang again. She turned one way and then another in confusion before the Asian Pacific forecast on the weather channel caught her attention. The phone rang a third time. She found the phone, picked it up.

"Regina?"

The world turned gray. "Elaine," Regina answered.

"There's a nice one coming to the newcomer's meeting tonight at the Institute. Fifth floor, 17<sup>th</sup> Street and Sixth Avenue. You remember?"

Regina remembered Elaine was the pretty one the boys chased in school, the smart one who impressed all the teachers and went to Brown University on scholarship. She was the one their father still talked to, and maybe their mother. "What?"

"Remember? I said I'd call when a nice new guy joined up. Introduce the two of you. You could go through orientation together. It's a wonderful opportunity to bond with someone. I'll never forget how Russell and I discovered each other at our orientation—"

"How's Eli and the kids, Elaine?"

After a silent beat, Elaine answered: "That's very pre."

"I'm a pre kind of girl. I remember things like ex-husbands and abandoned children. Even if they aren't my own."

"You're a lonely old school marm who talks to her furniture and kitchen appliances."

"It saves me the trouble of a real argument."

"Only if they don't talk back. You killed the fucking family cat because he cursed too much."

Regina almost hung up, but the memory of Soft Shoe stared up at her from the depths of the past, accusing her through his big hunter eyes. She wanted to run her hands through his fluffy coat, feel the flick of his tail across her arm, his rough tongue on her cheek. Her forearm burned with the memory of Soft Shoe scratching her, before the cat broke into a cursing fit, enraged at the way she really spoke. It was the cat talking back to her, understanding her true words and rejecting them, that had made Regina do what she had done. "Fuck you," she said.

Elaine breathed heavily on the other end. Regina could almost see her going through relaxation exercises, her well-endowed chest rising and falling, delicate eyelids quivering.

"I'm sorry," Elaine said. "That was very pre of me. Sometimes, my pre-reality returns, and I just want to work at a law office and make tons of money and get into real estate and marry a rich developer and vacation on Capri. Sometimes, my grip post-reality is not so strong and things that shouldn't be important to me at all, like kids and family and material wealth suddenly nag at me, and I feel compelled to seek them out. Old resentments come up, too, though the past is past. Dead, really, since I came into my Post Reality. I



shouldn't have even said I'm sorry because, you know, that's pre, too. There can't be any sorrow between perfectly accepting minds and souls in Post Reality. And people outside the Institute of Post Reality don't really matter. I shouldn't have even been trying to call you, that was pre, too. I'm in therapy for the problem, so there's no need for me to be concerned. Your opinion doesn't matter. I accept you. For a while, there, I just wanted you to join the Institute so badly I was willing to do anything. But that need is pre. Just like my anger over your stubbornness, and your craziness, and your attack on my sanity and reality. I have my own reality, now. All I can say is that I know we can help you. Together, we're strong. We don't have to explain anything to each other, or be angry, but if you want to go on hanging on to that pathetic little reality of yours, then you go right ahead. I don't need you here. You need us."

The phone shook in Regina's hand. Her mind spun as she tried to grasp the elusive logic infesting her sister. "You want to convert me to your reality. Brain wash me. But I'm not beautiful like you, or smart, so I can never have what you have. Only what I have."

"And what's that," Elaine said, in a monotone.

Regina answered, not with words, but with a sound like the buzzing from an angry hive. Her tongue tingled as if from too much hot sauce, while the rest of her mouth crawled with the tickling sensation of tiny, twitching, feathery limbs. The connections between different parts of her brain had been momentarily interrupted and something else was expressing itself over the normal channels of her communication.

Elaine gasped. Regina felt her sister flinch, struggle with the impulse to hang up and flee the noise Regina was making. The curtains across the studio's picture window rustled. The electric clock over the muted TV whined. The couch bed springs squeaked. The microwave bell rang, though there had been nothing cooking inside. The furnishings, electronics and appliances were restless. But like Elaine, they could not escape. The noise stung reality, paralyzed it, allowing doubts and anxieties to be planted into the world's fabric like parasitic eggs.

The sound cut off. Regina regained control of her voice, but found nothing to say.

Elaine wept. "I hate you. You ruined my life with your crazy shit. Corrupted me with your insanity. Nothing makes sense, anymore. You're a disease. You're eating away at my reality. Leave me alone, goddam you."

"You called me."

"You made me call you. You want to get into the Institute of Post Reality, so you can ruin that part of my life like you did my marriage and my job. Fuck you! Get out of my reality, bitch."

"Do you mean your pre or post reality?"

The phone line clicked into death.

Regina replaced the receiver. The heat in the studio was suffocating. The morning's burst of energy she relied on to get her to school was gone. A heavy feeling of lethargy seeped through her limbs and torso until she could no longer stand.

She lay down on the pull-out mattress, her sweat soaking through the dress until she had to kick off her shoes and slip out of her clothes. She closed her eyes, took deep breaths, tried to relax. The stifling heat felt like it came from an August noon instead of a May morning. She opened her eyes, looked at the clock. It was noon.

"Why didn't you tell me?" she wailed, throwing accusatory looks at the clock, TV, VCR, cable box, stereo. She slapped the mattress in frustration, pummeled the carpet, shook the side table that doubled as her night stand. "I didn't call in," she screamed at the refrigerator. "How do you think that's going to look on my record? Do you want me to get fired? Who's going to keep a roof over your heads? Who'll pay the cable and electric bills?"

Panic seethed under her skin like a second, living layer of flesh, like a monstrous, undulating caterpillar, its billion billion legs scrabbling in place, pricking muscle, scratching bone.

Regina punched the special number to her real daddy's phone, then picked up the receiver. A howl of noise, high-pitched, scratching and hissing, greeted her.

"Daddy? Daddy! I'm all alone. No one listens to me. The real me. It's like I don't exist. The words pour out of me but everyone forgets what I say: the kids at school, the principal, cab drivers, Mom, her husband, Elaine, cable service technicians, telephone operators, the refrigerator, chairs, the fan. They hear the sounds I make, but not what I mean, not what I want. What am I going to do? I'm hurting, daddy. Aching. Starving. Nobody understands me. Nobody really talks to me. They just throw words at me, like that's supposed to help, or make sense. I feel so empty, daddy, like a big shell about to break, only there's nothing inside. Daddy, you have to help me. How did you get Mom to listen, to fall in love with you so she could have me? Are there more like us, where I am, or where you are? Why won't you

tell me where you are, so I can visit? Is it someplace bad, like the hospital Mom lived in after I was born? What do I have to do to feel better? Please, daddy, tell me.”

A blast of noise made Regina hold the receiver away from her ear. The roar made her dizzy, and she fell back on the bed. She did not realize she had passed out until she woke, blood from her ear staining the sheets, an automatic operator message asking her to please hang up the phone because it was off the hook.

The studio felt as cramped and stifling as a prison cell. She washed her ear out, dressed in shorts and a tank top, put on sandals, started for the door. Realizing her mouth was dry, she stopped in the kitchen for a glass of orange juice. She found none in the refrigerator, and wondered what the note under the magnet was supposed to mean: “Nakti humi erosma sonyer allemason.” At the apartment door, another note declared: “Jidi umasu kyikayu omaph endailo.” She tore the paper down, crumpled it, threw it across the room. “What?” she asked the door, the refrigerator. They did not answer. She fled the studio weeping.

She ran through West Side streets, away from the river, where the water always gurgled a sly invitation for her to slip into its depths and forget her worries. She pushed through the lunch time crowd mixing with shoppers, tourists and delivery men on Broadway, hurried through the quiet residential blocks of brownstones and apartment buildings, until she reached the green haven of Central Park. The shadows under the trees called to her. She scurried to an empty bench in front of a stand of oaks, overlooking a field, by a path that led to the reservoir and its track at the next rise.

Heart racing, sweat continuing to bead on her face after she wiped her skin, Regina sat down, closed her eyes, breathed in the scents of wood and grass and dog shit. Childish laughter came to her from a distance. The music of children’s joy soothed her. She found their voices pleasant, not raucously obnoxious like in the classroom.

Later, she opened her eyes, watched runners go by on the track, the bicyclers cruise on the paths, softball players lug their equipment to distant fields.

Later, she remembered she had not eaten lunch. The lowering sun told her it was past dinner time. She hungered. But she valued the peace she had found in the park more.

Later, the shadows melted into the evening, which flowed to night. Human life drained from the park.

A rat rustled in the underbrush beneath her bench. Insect calls replaced the voices of children.

A police officer stepped up to her out of the gloom, raking the beam from his flashlight over her and the trees behind her. “Are you all right?”

Regina giggled. “Much better now, thank you.”  
“Let’s see some ID, lady.”

Regina handed her pocket book over. The officer pulled out her wallet, examined her driver’s licence, a Board of Education ID, her checkbook.

“What the hell is this?” he asked, holding up her licence under the flashlight. The name read: Ghirva Quistano. Address: Compak Numesto. Date of Birth: Ixis

Startled, Regina peered into the darkness beyond the officer’s flashlight. Smiling, she asked, “What’s your name? How old are you?” The sound that came out did not match her intended words, but felt closer to her true meaning. Hesitantly, the officer replied. The screech of his voice was raw, his tone brusque. He was not used to expressing what was inside him. He was young. He may even have been one of her students, years ago, though neither his true name or the name he wore sounded familiar. She understood that few from her classes grew up to hold such jobs. By the time one of her school years ended, the confidence and boldness needed to make a good police officer had usually been sucked out of her class, leaving a body of sullen and withdrawn students not likely to cause any problems for future teachers. The police officer might have just as easily been a lost child, like her, though considerably less self-aware. What a couple they might make, very nearly a spring and autumn romance. Not that she was too old for him. She could show him a trick or two she’d learned with her vibrator over the years. She had vast reserves of untapped energy, more than enough for a young, vibrant man.

Regina stood, took her purse back. She pushed the officer’s arm down, turned off his flashlight. “I have something to show you,” she said. “It’s over there.” She pointed to the deeper shadows. The insects stopped calling. She led him to the bushes, fell to the ground, caught his hand and pulled him down after her. She laughed as they searched for each other’s mouths to kiss. Their tongues touched. His cock grew as hard as his gun, and for a moment she wondered if she should take both her lover’s tools into her. But there was time enough for that later. The officer moaned, struggled against her embrace, pulled her closer. She kissed his neck, his hair and eyes, nose and lips, nipples, belly button. His

skin tasted of salt, blood and semen. He babbled, spouting words that made no sense. He also made sounds that reminded her of her father. A small cry of surprise and joy escaped her, and she was a child again, discovering wonders. He could do more than answer questions. He could speak the truths inside him.

She felt her father's loving hand pushing through the vast distance between them, delivering her from loneliness with the nourishing milk of his attention, the precious seed of his will.

"Yes?" she said, listening to the officer reveal himself. Again, encouraging him, she said, "Yes." He was crude, ignorant, but she was a teacher. He would learn.

She thanked her father for his gift, her voice crackling like static, before sinking deep into the

officer, wrapping herself in the folds of realities he carried deep inside, hidden from the world and himself. Where there had been two empty shells of flesh, one entity was growing. The void she lived with all her life filled with the voices of all the things around her, from trees and grass praying against the dark to the officer's handgun pleading for her to fire it against herself, the police, anyone or anything. She smiled in relief.

Her hand found the flashlight, and she turned it on and lit her companion's face with the beam. She saw something like love in the hugeness of his eyes, the gaping pit of his mouth. And she laughed with the joy of secret knowledge when she thought that all people like her sister might see in his expression was fear; all they might hear in his silent scream was madness.

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# *The Amazing* Martin Landawer

By Jeff Somers

**I** first failed to meet Martin Landawer my freshman year of college.

College was a convenient way to waste a few more years practicing charm and very little else, a good way to avoid any actual work. From what I remember of it, the scheme worked well enough: I don't recall any work—and I am sure I would remember any if I'd engaged in it. What I mostly did in school was sleep, what I mostly did when I wasn't sleeping was avoid work.

Avoiding work, you learn after four years, is more of a full-time job than most jobs. I think it taught you more about working for a living than actually working does. Nothing demonstrates the value of multi-tasking and delegation of authority better than a desire to have nothing to do. And in school, it's okay to have nothing to do. As a matter of fact it is an admirable and desirable personality trait. People come around to hang out, bask in empty afternoons and nothing to go to bed early for. Chicks are attracted to it. All that spare time to lavish on them exclusively.

No one tells you that it reverses with sickening speed once you graduate.

At any rate, we survive it somehow and a few of us even go on to become productive members of society. Most of my friends, however, went directly into advertising. Aside from no longer being my friends, they are also definitely not productive members of society. More like destructive—vampires, of a sort.

It is comments like this which prevent us from reconciling, I suspect. I cannot help it. I've grown bitter.

Martin Landawer was the name on my housing form, he was my roommate in Cosby 103, the dormitory I came to know as Soylen Green because of the puke-colored walls of the stairwells. When I arrived with my parents, his stuff was piled on top of one of the beds. We went out to dinner, and I behaved badly because I wanted my parents to leave. When I got back to my room, Martin Landawer's stuff was neatly put away. Pink Floyd posters had been put up, a stereo of immense proportions had been erected. The phone and answering machine had been connected, and already showed two messages, both for him.

In what was to become the defining moment of my life, there was no sign of Martin Landawer himself.

By the time I went exploring, seeking to meet my new neighbors, I found that Martin had beaten me to it. The girls were chatting excitedly about him and the guys nodded amiably when I mentioned him. When I returned to my room, Martin Landawer was not there but had been and had taken two telephone messages for me. My parents had spoken to him for fifteen minutes and couldn't wait to meet him.

It is possible, in the college world of flexible schedules, to not see someone for stretches



of time. A few days, certainly. But as my first semester gathered speed into the second and third months, I began to think that Martin Landawer was avoiding me on purpose, with an amount of success which hinted at obsession and mental imbalance. As the winter break drew near, I began to fear Martin Landawer, a man I'd never met despite being his roommate for so many months. I confessed these feelings to my marvelous new girlfriend, Tammy, one night in my room while staring balefully at his cluttered desk, so obviously well used.

"Is that stupid?" I asked Tammy, holding her hand.

"Yes," she said unflinchingly. "And there's something I need to tell you, too."

"What is it?" Sharing after all was the keystone of any truly meaningful relationship.

"I've really only been dating you so I could meet Martin. I'm dumping you."

My mouth hung open. "You've meet Martin?"

"Several times. Goodbye, David."

The next day there was a lengthy letter in blue ink on yellow legal paper tacked to my desk. In it, someone claiming to be Martin Landawer apologized profusely for falling in love with Tammy. He ended by saying he hoped we could go to lunch soon and talk it out, since he valued our friendship and wished it to continue.

His signature was tight and unremarkable. He used a good vocabulary and decent grammar, his style was neither clichéd or overly imaginative. I learned absolutely nothing from the letter, except that Martin Landawer had come to somehow regard me as one of his best friends so far at school.

I entered the winter break breathlessly.

Over the break, Martin Landawer called me twice, both times while I was out. I didn't return the calls. His voice on the answering machine was terrifyingly normal, cocky and deep, slightly amused. I saved the messages. To this day I have them at the beginning of several recordings which hold all of his voice mails. He wrote me another letter, concerned that we might drift as friends. I became obsessed with the fact that I didn't know what he looked like, that he might be anyone. He might sit next to me in theaters, pull up next to me at traffic

lights. He might introduce himself to me as someone else entirely.

I returned to school even more highly stressed than I had left. I stayed awake for fifty-six hours straight, waiting in our room for a glimpse of Martin Landawer. I made it into the fifth day and passed out.

Nineteen hours later I woke up to find Tammy sitting quietly next to my bed.

"David," she said, putting down her book. "We've been so worried! Are you okay? We couldn't wake you."

I smiled. "Really? And you watched me?"

"Martin's been up for the whole night, watching you. He had to go home, so I took over for him."

I froze and, for a moment, felt hysteria bubbling within me. "The whole night. . . gone home."

"Well, you're up. I gotta go. Hope you feel better, David."

On the last day of school that year, I woke up alone with another standard Martin Landawer letter waiting on the empty desk. Martin had apparently packed silently and quickly, and aside from the letter there was no sign that he'd ever existed. I might have been rooming with myself. I was beginning to fear that I had been, and words like psychotic were accumulating meaning in my life.

The letter told me what a great time Martin had had rooming with me, what great friends we'd become, how well I'd dealt with the Tammy situation. It exhorted me to get together with him over the summer and informed me that he'd taken care of our housing for the next year and looked forward to another wild year.

"Good afternoon, Housing."

"Yes, I'd like to change my dorm assignment."

"Name and student number?"

"David Stims, 491663."

"Just a sec. . . Mr. Stims?"

"Yes?"

"Don't worry, your housing assignment has been taken care of."

"Yes, I know. I'd like to change it."

"Let me explain, Mr. Stims: Marty Landawer has already arranged for you to room with him again. He's quite fond of you."

"Uh. . . yes, I know. I'd like to change my assignment. If you—"

"Excuse me?"

"I'd like to change my assignment. If there are no more empty dorms, then I'd like to cancel it—"

"Excuse me?"

"Cancel it."

"Um. . . Mr. Stims, I'm not sure I can do that."

"Why not?"

"Well, it's not easy to just—"

"Well, Martin Landawer did it, didn't he?"

"You're not Martin Landawer."

I wrote a letter to Martin explaining as politely as I could that I wanted out, that I needed to not room with him the next year. He wrote back expressing sorrow at my change of heart. He thought we'd become close. If I wanted to live with someone else, of course it was okay. He hoped we could still be friends. I felt like I was breaking up with someone. It was so ridiculous I began laughing. I kept laughing for days, early in the summer, chuckles and snorts hidden behind grins. I was breaking up with someone I'd never met. I couldn't stop laughing. My family grew worried.

"Hello?"

"Is this David Stims?"

"Yes?"

"This is the Department of Housing. We're calling you to let you know your housing assignment has been changed. You've got a single room on campus."

"Wow. A single."

"Yes. We had to bump a few people off the list, but we managed it."

"Bump a few people?"

"Martin Landawer arranged it. He likes you, Stims."

The rest of my college days passed in a cloud of oddity and phantasm. Martin Landawer called me regularly when I wasn't home, leaving cheerful messages showing an uncanny knowledge of my life. On my birthdays he sent me cards signed by Tammy and himself. He invited me to parties I never went to—except once, when I was drunk and unhappy and feeling foolish. I stumbled halfway across campus, desperate for a glimpse, and arrived at a nice off-campus apartment, small but well-kept and packed with people, none of whom were Martin Landawer. They were all full of stories, though. Martin had left with Tammy

about an hour before because she was sick and he wanted to take care of her. The girls still drinking Martin Landawer's beer were weepy with longing at this amazing bout of romance. The guys were less impressed. I got myself a beer and leaned glumly against a window sill. A redhead with happy feet turned to leer at me, her jeans tight and her blouse loose.

"How do you know Martin?"

"I roomed with him freshman year."

"Wow! You must be Dave Stims!"

I was startled. "How'd you know?"

She smiled, absolutely the greatest smile I'd ever seen. I was enthralled, and settled back to watch.

"Martin gabs about you all the time," she explained. Then she blushed, delicately. The blush was even more entertaining. "He seems to think we'd make a good couple."

"What's your name?"

"Linda."

At our wedding, Martin Landawer sent Linda and I a gorgeous ivory sculpture of a bouquet of flowers, entitled Love, and his regrets. The sculpture was beautiful, delicate and detailed. Linda cried, saying it was just like Martin, and that she wished he was there to dance with her. Martin was in England, a few years out of school and, as far as my vague understanding of his life's work went, making the beginnings of a huge personal fortune.

Dancing with Linda warm and giggling against me, I grinned until I swore I could feel blood leaking down my face in strain. All I could think about was Martin Landawer and his goddamned wedding gift. He and Tammy weren't getting married until next June, I knew, and I seethed, wondering what I would get them, swearing I'd get them nothing. I'd been invited to the wedding, of course, and I hadn't decided either way. The RSVP was a hot coal on my dresser, waiting. I eventually decided to attend; I broke both legs in a car accident two days before the event and couldn't. Martin asked a doctor friend of his to check in on me in the hospital.

"Mr. Stims? I'm Nick Alry. Martin Landawer asked me to check on you, make sure you were getting the best attention," he said in a careless rush, striding around my flowered room. "And I graduated Harvard first in my class—thanks to Martin!—so I guess I'm qualified. He speaks

very highly of you."

"He does?"

"Oh yes. Always says he would have gone far astray in school if it hadn't been for your influence." He smiled at me. "When Martin Landawer says that about any man, it's a man I want to meet, chum." He held out his hand. I shook it, feeling numb.

"Well, how're you feeling?"

"Numb."

He appeared alarmed. "Well? Well, we'll have to take care of that. If I let you lose a leg, Martin will ruin me!"

He grinned, but I don't think he was joking.

When I was thirty-one, I was making good money in a job I'd gotten largely due to a letter of recommendation Martin had written for me. My interview had been a Martin Landawer lovefest, two hours of his exploits and best jokes, and was I really that David Stims, the one Martin always told stories about? I was, I said. I expressed honest amazement at how much Martin Landawer talked about me.

I spent my time at work hiding in my office, screening calls and refusing lunch dates. I had no duties I could detect. Once, I wrote a memo asking people to stop inviting me to lunch. It went over well.

I was making good money. Great money, really, and I rarely went to work after a while. No one noticed. So I tried to hire private detectives to get me pictures of Martin Landawer; all but one refused, and most seemed insulted that I would ask. The one who agreed was a sullen man named Penn, fat and sweaty, who dressed in salvation army clothes and so looked to have walked right out of the nineteen forties and fifties.

"All right," he'd sighed when I'd made the proposal. "Bastard's mad at me anyway."

I never heard from him again.

At some point, I'm not sure when, everyone realized at once that I was riding on Martin Landawer's good opinion, and I was fired. I even think Martin had something to do with that, the way he hired me on literally the next day.

"Hello?"

"David Stims?"

"Yes?"

"This is Marcia Wilkes with Landawer Incorporated. Do you have a moment?"

"Uh, yes. Did you say Landawer Incorporated?"

"Yes. We understand you've recently become available."

"Available?"

"Unemployed."

"Yeah. . .about fifteen hours ago. How'd you—"

"We'd like to offer you a position."

"A position?"

"Mr. Landawer is very enthusiastic about hiring you."

I grew bored. "Really. What a surprise."

"Will you come in for an interview?"

"Will he see me?"

"Excuse me?"

"I want to see him."

"Excuse me, Mr. Stims, but aren't you—"

"I want to see him."

"Mr. Stims? I must—"

"If he wants me to work for him, I want to meet with him. Face to face, in the flesh."

Two days later, while I ate Oreos and drank milk in front of the cartoons, there was a knock at my door. I was wearing pajamas and a flannel robe, feeling fat and dejected. I opened up and found a fat, balding black man in a plaid sports jacket and dark glasses. He beamed at me, yellow teeth and red gums. Very red gums.

"Martin?" I blurted.

"Mr. Stims?"

I nodded. "Martin?"

"No. My card," he handed me a bright white card with the words NOT MARTIN LANDAWER printed in black ink on it. I looked up at him carefully. He grinned wider. "I need that, you see, because I only meet people when they demand to see Mr. Landawer." He looked past me. "May I come in, Mr. Stims?"

"Of course." I stepped aside, still staring dumbly at the card in my hand. Deftly, he plucked it from me as he squeezed past. He smelled of cigarettes and cough medicine. Without a word he pulled out a pack of cigarettes and lit one up.

"Mr. Stims, do you know that Mr. Landawer is an extremely busy man, Mr. Stims?"

I followed him into my house. "I suppose he is."

"I wonder," he said conversationally while he examined the bric-a-brac along my mantle, "if you know how many people would like to

see Martin Landawer every day?"

"I—I don't know."

"Ah." He clucked his tongue. "You don't."

He turned to me. "Hundreds, Mr. Stims."

"Oh."

"If he gave just a few minutes to everyone, he would still not get through them all."

"Oh."

"Do you know how we deal with that?"

I swallowed hard. "No."

He turned to look at me. "We discourage them."

"Discourage?"

"Discourage."

I licked my lips. "I see."

He smiled brightly. "Good! That's good. It comes down, then, to a simple choice. Accept Mr. Landawer's offer, or forget it. That's it."

I buried my face in my hands. "If I worked for him, would I get to see him?"

His voice was cheerful. "He does own the company, Mr. Stims."

I laughed without humor. "That's not an answer."

"Your office is ready any time you'd like to start."

When Martin Landawer died, I sat immobilized by stunned disbelief for a full day. It seemed impossible that I should outlive Martin. Tammy phoned me late at night, tearfully informing friends and family of his demise. Forty-five is too young for anybody to die, but I'd expected Martin to last at least as long as me. I felt empty and directionless, lost.

"David," Tammy said with a hitch in her voice, "we'd like you to give the eulogy."

"What?"

"We'd like you to give the eulogy. You knew Martin best. You were his best friend. He would like you to do it, I'm sure."

I stared at the phone in frank disbelief. Did she know who she was talking to? Did she know who I was?

"Tammy, I—"

"Please, David. He would have wanted it."

I laughed hollowly. "Then he would have gotten it, eh?"

I wore my best black suit and a good thick undershirt, since I woke up sweating rivers and knew I wouldn't stop anytime soon. The service was large, hundreds of people, most arriving by limousine. There were former presidents, prime

ministers, and some royalty. A few movie stars, a number of poets, a few college nobodies I remembered. If the service had been open-casket, I think I might have made it through the speech I'd carefully prepared and gone home.

The casket, however, was closed, and as I stepped up to the pulpit, quiet humming all around me, I stared at it. I couldn't blink.

"Martin Landawer," I began tremulously, staring at the casket. "Was a man who. . .who. . ."

I licked my lips carefully. The were all watching me politely, the women almost to a one weeping into tissues and hankies. A lot of the men were red-eyed too. The respectful silence wasn't for me, though, and I knew it.

I tore my eyes away, and faced them all with new calm. I had stopped sweating. They watched me, and without another word I stepped away from the pulpit and began to angle around the floral arrangements, panting with fresh excitement. They watched me with careful looks and didn't move until I put my hands on the coffin lid.

Voices rose up behind me and the air began to swirl and heat.

"Stims, are you mad?"

"David! Stop!"

"Hell, I wouldn't mind seeing him either!"

I didn't wait any longer; I could hear them moving, gently and politely, towards me. I planted my fingers under the lid and shoved with both hands.

Shouting, then, hands on me, and I was lifted up, floating magically up into the air as I shouted back, my arms out and fingers splayed. After a moment black suits and dresses filled my sight as I was pulled back. I was laughing then. I was shoved roughly to my feet as the cacophony around the coffin increased into a confused babble, alarm and terror and puzzlement.

"What the—" one of the men holding me exclaimed.

"Martin," I wheezed. "Oh, Martin."

They started to pull me away, to push me outside, but it was too late.

Laughing, I allowed them to pull me away, watched the room shrink from sight and all those people, gathered around the coffin, staring in disbelief.



# DIRECT LINE

By Ramsey Campbell

**A**s Sharpe strode into the passage under the railway, he heard a woman talking to herself ahead. Since the last of the lights had been vandalised overnight, the tunnel was flooded with darkness. He wasn't about to be daunted by that or by her, even if she was homeless or mad. As he halved the distance to her, the train he'd just left passed overhead as though the July heat had congealed into an elongated clap of thunder, and he glimpsed her clutching at her face. "No," she cried, high-pitched as her footsteps and their echoes as she fled. An object clattered down the wall to join the rest of the litter. Sharpe was opening his mouth to ask her to retrieve it, when he saw it was luminous.

An abandoned hypodermic, to which it lent a poisonous green glow, distracted him from immediately seeing that it was a mobile phone. Even he recognised that it was expensive, the kind of item his pupils at school boasted about. It weighed less than a tiny skull. When he brought it not too close to his ear, he was greeted by a rush of static that seemed for a moment to be trying to form words. The noise sank into the dark as the phone was extinguished, and he hurried to catch up with its owner. Wastefulness offended him as much as litter.

The tunnel opened onto the road to the school. The road was rowdy with schoolboys,

some of whom nudged each other at the sight of him. Had the woman been intimidated by the mass of them? She could have taken refuge in any of dozens of grimy houses split into secretive flats or in one of the alleys strewn with refuse. He was holding up his find, as if this might draw her out of hiding, when behind him a boy said, "Sharpy's got a mobile now. He can't say nothing about ours."

Sharpe swung around to confront the twelve-year-old's unnecessarily small face, which grew smoothly innocent. "Perhaps you saw the lady this belongs to, Lomax. She ran out of there not a minute ago."

The boy's stunted crony, Latham, peered up from under his brows as though out of a lair. "We thought she must of been raped."

"We looked for who done it and we seen you."

"I was attempting to return the property she



dropped. I hope you would have done as much." When this provoked two identical disbelieving stares, he said, "You were asked to tell me where the lady went."

"Behind them houses like she couldn't wait to have a shit," Lomax said, pointing to the alley Sharpe had just passed.

"No, it was them like she had to piss," said Latham, indicating an alley beyond the exit from the pedestrian tunnel.

Sharpe hadn't time to rebuke the vulgarity, whether it was automatic or deliberate. He sidled down the nearer alley, past bulging waist-high plastic bags torn open by animals or kicked asunder by children. Halfway down, he met a transverse alley overlooked by the backs of two streets. There was no sign of the woman, but another at an upper window turned her head to keep an offensively suspicious eye on him. When he called, "I've lost property for someone," it neither assuaged her stare nor attracted the owner. He stowed the mobile inside his jacket as he left the alley, ignoring questions and suggestions about where he'd been and why.

Lomax and Latham were even less eager than usual to reach the school. He caught up with them at the entrance to the schoolyard packed with uproar and furtive misdeeds, those that bothered to be furtive. "Did you give it to her, sir?" Lomax enquired.

"Did she like it, sir?" said Latham.

Their untypical enthusiasm made their meaning clear, but he wasn't going to waste time on it. "I shouldn't have expected any sense from the terrible Ls," he said.

He was entering the school, when the bell began to clang. He helped herd the scholars to the assembly hall and joined his colleagues on the stage, from which he fixed his stare on his class near the front of the long hot room. The general restlessness lessened as the headmaster marched to his lectern. Mr Thorn let his gaze roam until there was silence, which turned more inert as he addressed the question of self-sacrifice. Soon, he was asking five hundred boys to think of items they could live without. He had just cited mobile phones, when one rang.

For once, it didn't belong to any of the boys, though it was set to the remains of a chorus from the *Messiah* with a disco beat: "Hal-lel-lu-jah, hal-lel-lu-jah, lu-jah, lu-jah, lu-jah..." As Sharpe glanced along the rank of his colleagues, he realised that several were gazing at him. "Excuse me, head,"

he murmured, "not mine," only to demonstrate something like the opposite by retreating into the wings. He snatched out the mobile and thumbed the key that bore an icon of a vertical receiver. He was about to speak, when the phone did so in a woman's voice so impatient it left politeness behind. "Got it?"

Sharpe responded in a whisper, if a loud one. "Yes," was all he said, since it seemed obvious.

"Can you bring it?"

"Where?"

"Usual place." As he concluded she had less language to her than the worst of his pupils she added, "It's Sue."

His own terseness was designed to interfere as little as possible with Mr Thorn's speech. "Where again?"

"What?" Even more suspiciously, she asked, "Is this Janey?"

"If she's the lady who owns the phone she dropped it. Perhaps you could –"

"Wrongnumber. I don't know any Janey. I'm not Sue, either."

Presumably she had run out of denials. A sound like a wind through a bone replaced her voice. He poked the button inscribed with a supine receiver and was putting the mobile away when it rang again. Mr Thorn faltered irritably in the middle of a word. Sharpe jabbed the first button and hissed, "Yes?"

At first he heard nothing but static as the green glow of the mobile isolated him in the dimness. When it spoke, the voice was barely distinguishable from the mass of thin sound, and he had to strain to grasp the words. "Give it back."

"That'll be Jane, will it?"

"Give it back."

The shrill voice was so unsteady it seemed close to dissolving into the static. "You need to tell me where you are," he said.

"Don't."

"How else would you suggest I do as you asked?"

"Give it back."

"You may collect it this afternoon if you wish," Sharpe said and quelled the call.

He stayed offstage until Mr Thorn said, "Use the day wisely," as usual. The folding seats and then their occupants produced sounds that might have accompanied the collapse of the roof. As Sharpe appended himself to the parade of teachers, the headmaster beckoned him. "Important calls, Kenneth?"

"I think the police may be interested."

Mr Thorn's bland chubby face twitched and underscored its receding hairline. "The more that can be resolved internally the better. We don't want to gain a reputation as a school that has to keep calling the police."

"It isn't any of the boys this time. I've a strong suspicion this belongs to somebody we'd want to keep away from them."

"By all means do so at your earliest convenience."

"I intend to," Sharpe said and applied some dignity to descending from the stage. He thought of entrusting the phone to Mr Thorn or the school secretary until lunchtime, but suppose either of them answered it and sent the owner into hiding? He hadn't time to explain the situation when his class was bound for the classroom. He strode in pursuit so fiercely, that some of the boys in the corridor lowered their voices or even made way for him.

Too many of his pupils strewn about the classroom looked ready to be amused by him. It was clear that Lomax spoke for them all by enquiring, "Did the woman you was chasing want you, sir?"

"Sit down. Sit down. Sit down, now." Once a similar formula quietened them at last Sharpe said, "She wants her phone. Who can tell me how to switch it off?"

No other question he had ever asked had brought a fraction of the enthusiasm. When he succeeded in hushing the uproar, he gave the mobile to Latham, since the boy and his associate were on the front row. "It's off, sir," Latham said, fingering a button.

"Well done, Latham. Let's see if you can do as well with algebra."

Apparently, the comment sounded like a joke. Sharpe returned the unlit mobile to his pocket and talked through the equations he'd chalked on the board after yesterday's last class so that he didn't have to turn his back. The virtually uniform blankness that confronted him, only stiffened when he asked if there was anything that anybody hadn't understood. "Heads down, then," he said wearily and watched them duck to their exercise books like cattle to sparse parched grass.

How could they fail to enjoy mathematics? It enshrined truths that had lasted and would last as long as the universe. It gave shape and stability to life, and everything depended on it. If they couldn't appreciate its beauty, how could they resist its excitement? It was the universal language and a system of belief immune to change. Rather than

grow depressed by the sluggish ruminations or the pretence of them all around him, he strolled to look over the shoulder of one of the few budding algebraists. He was watching the solution to an equation appear on the page, under small inky fingers – he thought life had no greater satisfaction to offer him – when an insect larger than it had any right to be, came to life.

It buzzed silently as it writhed against his chest until he dragged it out to wriggle on his palm. "What have you done to this, Latham?"

"Means someone's trying to get you," Latham said over the general laughter.

"They may continue trying," Sharpe declared and shut the phone inside the teachers' desk, where it struggled on its back before growing dormant. In his hand, it had felt unnaturally vigorous, desperate to move, and the possibility that it might recommence crawling about in the desk distracted him more than the other outbursts of restlessness he had to subdue. If the desk had locked, he might have left the mobile there instead of taking it to the staffroom.

"That's not like you, Kenneth," the English master said with a flutter of his eyelids. "Expecting a date?"

"Most emphatically not," Sharpe said and covered the phone on the staffroom table with a teaching journal. The mobile had to accompany him to his other morning classes, however. In the last one it seemed to wriggle for an instant in his hand, as though unwilling to be abandoned to the desk. He shut the lid and wished he could have nailed it down.

For once, he was nearly as eager as his pupils for the lunchtime bell. He buried the mobile in an outer pocket, only to have to rest a hand on it in case any of the pickpockets tried to filch it as he hurried through the school. More boys than he suspected had permission were swaggering or sneaking out of the gates, but he hadn't time to interrogate them. Could Jane – he felt uncomfortable being on first-name terms with her – have trailed him to wait until he left the school? More than once, he seemed to glimpse a tattered scrawny form pacing him more or less on all fours behind the houses on the way to the police station. It must be a dog draped in some of the trash it had scavenged.

The police station was at the far end of the street from the railway. Beyond the glass doors of the low concrete block, youths lounged against the enquiries counter while an old couple sat on straight

chairs and looked nervously out of place. Two trills of the bell on the counter were required to bring a constable out of the office. "Can you wait a few minutes, sir?" she barely asked Sharpe.

"A lady dropped this."

"I'll get a lost property form," the policewoman said with visible relief, and reappeared with a clipboard. "Your name, sir?"

"Sharpe. Kenneth Sharpe, but I ought to say I think this may belong to one of our local drug dealers. I believe I was called by one of her customers earlier."

The policewoman let the clipboard fall. "Do you wish to make a formal complaint?"

"I don't think I've the evidence to do that. I couldn't identify the caller. I just thought you should be aware what kind of person may be reclaiming the phone."

"You think it's likely they'd come here for it if they're what you say."

One of the youths sniggered, and Sharpe recognised him from years ago: Latham's older and even less virtuous brother. "Not if you told them to come here," Sharpe confined himself to saying. "I thought if they rang, someone might arrange to meet them in plain clothes."

"Have you done much investigating yourself?"

"I'm a teacher," Sharpe said, meaning yes.

"You'll have checked the last number that called you, then."

"I must confess I haven't."

She tapped keys too swiftly for him to follow and raised the mobile to her face. "No last number. It might as well have been nobody."

"The boy I asked to switch it off for me must have done that." Sharpe restrained himself from glaring at Latham's brother and said, "Can you really not learn anything?"

"Best if you keep it, sir. You can let us know if something significant comes up. You're at the school down the road, are you? We can always find you there if the lady gets in touch."

Did the policewoman think his find too negligible, or might she even disbelieve him? As he stalked out of the building, he heard another snigger and almost swung around in case he caught her sharing the derision. She hadn't called him sir as often as she could have and, besides, he knew that many of the boys used the word as a gibe. Perhaps she had. He strode angrily back to the school, failing to overtake or identify a group of boys emitting smoke that he was almost sure wasn't tobacco, and left the

mobile in the office.

The last period of the afternoon returned him to his own class for a geometry lesson. He was feeling close to conveying the beauty of a theorem, when the school secretary knocked at the door. "Can you turn this off, Mr Sharpe? I haven't time to keep answering it."

"I thought it had been switched off." About to confront Latham, Sharpe realised the policewoman must have revived the mobile. "Not you, Latham," he nevertheless said and offered the task of killing the phone to the most numerate pupil. "Did you say you took some calls, Miss Dodd?"

"One. I didn't think it could be for you. They just kept saying they wanted something back."

"That will be the lady who lost it. Who can find me her number?"

All the boys began to clamour. It seemed safest to leave the job to the numerate boy, but he looked puzzled. "Says there wasn't anybody."

"Better stick to figures, Jarvis." Of course the woman had withheld her number. Sharpe collected the mobile and held it out to the secretary. "Anything amiss, Miss Dodd?"

She shook her head while the class giggled at his choice of words. She might have convinced him if she hadn't hesitated another second. As soon as the lesson petered out, having failed to recapture the communication he had thought he was establishing with more of the class than usual, he made for the office. "What exactly was the matter, Miss Dodd?"

"I just didn't like the feel of it."

"Which you're saying was..."

"Like it wanted to crawl out of my hand." With a laugh apparently intended as disparaging she added, "I expect I was distracted. I nearly dropped it because I thought someone was hiding behind the railings."

She could do with an English lesson, he thought. The railings of the schoolyard were inches apart and less than an inch thick. He took the mobile to his classroom and set about marking homework. As he penned cross after dispiriting cross, the green ink put him in mind of the glow that had led him to the phone in the tunnel. He couldn't help growing tense in case the mobile sprang to life, and once he seemed to glimpse a figure watching him between entirely too few railings. Miss Dodd's fancies must have impressed him more than they had any right to. When he glanced up, the street was deserted, except for a momentary flurry of movement above a kerbside grid. Without doubt, it was an effect of the



heat, which also made him mop his forehead.

At least the street was still deserted when he left the school. Whatever his class might be up to was no longer his concern. Could the tunnel under the railway be where Jane met her customers? When he peered down, it he saw nothing except litter. A low restless heap several feet long was scraping against a wall in the depths of the gloom.

More passengers than usual in his carriage on the train had mobile phones, unless he was more aware of them. The spectacle of so many people talking to nobody visible made him feel threatened with having to do so. He mustn't allow it to turn him against using the train; his car had been vandalised once at the school, and Mr Thorn's response had been so guarded, that Sharpe had felt accused of bringing the place into disrepute. He did his best to ignore the voices all around him while he gazed out at the embankment strewn with litter that twitched and jerked with the passing of the train. He could almost have thought the disturbance was following him.

Most of the litter fell short of his station. The trees shading the streets were too mature for vandals to destroy but surely too slender for anyone to hide behind. He had glanced back only twice by the time he reached his neat two-bedroomed single-bedded house. Usually closing the door behind him felt like being sure of the rest of the day: a simple dinner with half a bottle of wine, the news on the radio, a browse among the comfortable old novels that occupied the spare bedroom, a book to take to bed. Now all this felt brittle with the possibility of an interruption. He planted the mobile on the kitchen table and watched it as he ate, and imagined it stirred furtively, more than once, before it started to writhe so vigorously, it knocked against his plate. As he seized it and jabbed the appropriate button, he thought of disguising his voice in case the caller wasn't the owner. Disgust with the situation provoked him to demand, "Yes?"

Static rushed at him, bearing but almost drowning a voice. "Give it back."

"We've already established I need to know where it should be taken."

The static rose to meet him, and he had the impression, all the more unpleasant because irrational, that the speaker was doing the same. "Give it back."

"Are you incapable of saying anything else?" All at once Sharpe's temper deserted him. "Is it the effect of your drugs?"

There was silence or rather wordlessness for so long that he knew he'd scored a point. At last, a thin desiccated aspect of the static pronounced some of, "Give it back."

"If you want your property I suggest you contact the police. I have."

Should he have added that? Wouldn't it make her afraid to reveal herself? Perhaps she was too brazen or too befuddled by drugs not to do so. When there was no response beyond a sluggish flurry of noises too shapeless for words, he ended the call. He felt he'd shown enough responsibility for one night, and tried to remember how Jarvis had switched the mobile off. He must have mistaken the formula, because halfway through the triumphal procession from the mobile set about diminishing Handel.

Sharpe grabbed it from the low table it was sharing with *Nicholas Nickelby* and poked the rampant icon, then the prostrate one. This didn't earn him much of a respite. Verdi's procession was still on the march, when the phone recommenced abridging Handel. He jabbed the keys again and thought of flinging the insistent object in the dustbin. Instead, he paused the compact disc while he tramped with the phone to his bedroom, the most distant room. He shoved the mobile under both his pillows and leaned on them as if it might give in to his hopes and suffocate.

Not even its ditty did. He heard it several times during the section of the opera he forced himself to appreciate. It persisted throughout the news, after which, it refused to let him read so much as an uninterrupted page. Surely the battery must run down soon, but it had lost none of its vim by the time his eyes began to ache. He retrieved the mobile from its lair to bury it under a cushion in the front room and under *Nickelby* as well.

How often did it ring as he laboured to sleep? He couldn't tell when the tune reduced to idiocy was only in his head. He wished he hadn't let the phone into his bedroom. Once, as he started awake from almost no doze at all, he thought he felt it crawling under the pillows, unless somebody was groping in search of it or something it had left behind was coming to a kind of life. He reared up to seize the light-cord, and as he uncovered the sheeted mattress, he had the impression of turning over a stone. Was the patch of darkness on the sheet only the shadow of his head? Since no amount of rubbing the mark with the underside of a pillow had any visible result, he lowered his head into the dark.

He dreamed he slept more than he did. In the morning, he stumbled down to glare at the phone, mockingly silent now. At least the day allowed him to put enough distance between them and, he hoped, to think how to dispose of his burden. On the train he felt trapped by ringtones, especially by the threat of hearing the one he'd grown to loathe. In the passage from the station, he caught up with a trail of spicy smoke that none of his fellow commuters seemed to find worthy of remark. Was one of the boys in the street the culprit? Sharpe's eyes were smarting with his attempts at detection by the time he reached the school.

As he trudged to the assembly hall he met Mr Thorn. "No interruptions today, I trust," the headmaster murmured.

Sharpe thought this worse than unfair, not least because several boys had overheard, but restrained himself to saying, "I hope so too."

He was able to continue until early in his first lesson. He thought he'd snagged the imagination of some of the class with the concept of infinity until a phone burst into the theme from a television horror series. "I thought I'd switched it off," Lomax said, less an apology than a complaint that Sharpe couldn't help feeling was aimed at him, especially when the boy added with a fraction of a grin, "It's for you, sir."

"Bring it to me."

Once the boy had finished sauntering up to him, Sharpe managed to turn the phone off before shutting it in his desk. "Aren't you going to answer it, sir?" Lomax said.

"You may collect it from the office after school. Heads down to your work now. Silence. Heads down."

Sharpe's triumph was rather undermined by Miss Dodd, who looked wary of accepting a mobile from him when he detoured to the office on the way to his next class. He would have welcomed a mid-morning break and a longer one at lunchtime, but he was in charge of the yard. As he watched for misbehaviour and swooped to deal with miscreants, he kept being confused by the heat and his lack of sleep – kept glimpsing movements too large for a spider but otherwise as thin beyond the railings. Of course, nothing was there whenever he gave in to the temptation to check.

Before lunchtime was over, he knew he was the butt of a joke. In less than an hour, three boys with mobiles told him they had a call for him. Their expressions were sullen or bewildered or both,

which he put down to slyness, if not to drugs. The first two exhausted his patience, and he sent the third to explain himself to the headmaster. Sharpe suspected that the hellish Ls were the instigators of the prank, even before Latham's mobile interrupted the elucidation of a theorem in the final lesson. "It was off," Latham objected.

"Exactly like your friend's, no doubt. Do tell us all who's calling."

"Dunno," said Latham, having brought the rudimentary tune to an end. "It's for you, though."

"Unluckily for you I've heard that more than once too often. I'll have the truth this time."

"It is," the boy protested with an aggrieved air. "Maybe it's your dealer. My brother said –"

"All this tomfoolery was his idea, was it? I rather think if anybody's dealer is calling it will be yours. Let me speak to them at once."

"It's not. They never call me. I've not got none."

"Which means you have." With an odd sense of sleepwalking, Sharpe darted to wrench the phone from the boy's grasp, only to be met by silence as flat as the earpiece. "Show me the number that rang," he ordered.

Latham dealt a key a resentful poke and displayed a blank screen. "See, I didn't know."

"Go and convince the headmaster of that if you can. The rest of you, heads down."

Should he have taken the boy to Mr Thorn? The class would have degenerated into chaos in his absence. Without order you had nothing, a point that Latham proved by not returning. Presumably, he'd stolen home, unless he was meeting his dealer. The thought that Sharpe could be responsible for this lodged like hot ash behind his eyes. He was returning Lomax's phone at the end of the lesson when a thirteen-year-old brought the message that Mr Thorn wanted Mr Sharpe in his office.

"Yes, head."

"I've just had to deal with one of your boys." As if the name might be written there, the headmaster frowned at the papers arranged on his desk before saying, "Latham."

"He did come to see you, then. We haven't lost all control."

"That may seem to be the question." Mr Thorn lifted his gaze, which appeared to hope to see more than it did. "He says you accused him of buying drugs in class. I take it you've some proof."

"I didn't quite say that to him, but I certainly wouldn't discount the possibility."

"Best kept to yourself unless there's evidence,

Kenneth. And then he says you assaulted him.”

“Assaulted, good heavens, I think not.” Sharpe had a disconcerting sense of having dreamed the incident or of dreaming now. “I took a phone away from him,” he said. “Phones in class are still against the rules, I believe.”

“By force.”

“No more than necessary. Really none at all.”

“Would his classmates agree with you, do you think?” As Sharpe’s sense of injustice stopped up his words, Mr Thorn said, “I’m hopeful that I’ve persuaded him to accept your apology on Monday, but it will depend on what his parents choose to do, his guardian, rather. Try and forget about it over the weekend and relax. If you’ll forgive my saying so, you seem a little drugged yourself.”

He maintained a guardedly sympathetic expression until Sharpe turned away in disgust. By the time Sharpe reached the door, Mr Thorn was intent on his paperwork. “Head down,” Sharpe muttered, no longer caring if he was heard.

He was being sent home as a wrongdoer, was he? Let the school and the homework he had still to mark survive without him for a few days, then. He ignored all the boys and their activities, however villainous, as he made for the station. If intervening earned him more blame than the culprits, it wasn’t worth the risk.

A dog was grubbing among the rubbish in the middle of the passage beneath the railway. He heard its surreptitious feeble movements and saw the dull glint of its eyes, if those weren’t hypodermics it was shifting. He didn’t need to venture in to confirm how unpleasantly skinny it was.

The train felt like a refuge from it until he remembered he would be surrounded by phones. When he saw a man in the next carriage take a call and look around in quest of someone, Sharpe couldn’t help crouching out of view, however irrational that was. Surely the man wasn’t shouting after him as Sharpe hurried away from the train.

As soon as he was home, he dashed into the front room to discover what the choked sound was. The battery must be low; the mobile wasn’t ringing so much as rattling. Even when he leaned on the cushion the ragged noise refused to be suffocated. When the cushion began to twitch as if the phone was struggling to reach him, he left the room and slammed the door.

He couldn’t eat much. He couldn’t concentrate on music or reading or even the news. It seemed impossible that he could hear the half-dead sound

through both the cushion and the door, but wherever he was in the house, he did. Was lack of sleep inflaming his senses? When the words of a Victorian chapter grew as restless on the page as he heard the mobile was, he retreated to bed.

At last, his ears gave up straining to listen for activity in the house. In the early hours he awoke and hastened downstairs to return the mobile where he’d found it. He used its glow to search the passage for the owner. It wasn’t she, however, who wobbled upright in the gloom, raising a face so withered it was featureless except possibly for eyes and parting tattered greenish lips to mouth, “Give it back.” As some of a hand groped to catch hold of him, he managed actually to waken. He wanted to think he was still asleep, because he heard a whisper somewhere near him.

He had to force himself to extend a hand into the dark. Once the light was on, he identified the noise as the death rattle of the mobile. This wasn’t reassuring; it sounded far too like a sluggish, almost formless repetition of the phrase from his dream. As he struggled to believe he was imagining the similarity, he heard a feeble thumping downstairs – a knocking on a door.

He kicked away the bedclothes and stumbled onto the landing. The sound was in the front room. Something was bumping weakly but persistently against the far side of the door. He ran downstairs and flung the door wide, sweeping the object backwards. At once, it began to crawl towards him in the midst of a dim flickering greenish stain that was the only illumination in the room.

He’d had enough. The police could deal with its antics however they liked. He dashed upstairs to drag yesterday’s clothes on. Having picked up the mobile between finger and thumb, he dropped it in an outer pocket of his jacket and left the house. He mustn’t be fully awake. He was making for the local police station before he remembered it had been closed last year.

The one by the school was the closest, half an hour’s walk away. As he tramped in that direction, the houses shrank around their loudness. Beyond some of the open windows, sleepless televisions flared, while other rooms were packed with discoloured silhouettes jigging to pile-driver music. Once a car screeched past him, full of boys who looked too young to be out so late and drawing behind it the smoke of a fat shared cigarette. He was glad not to recognise any of the boys, but shouldn’t the police be dealing with them? If the absence of the law

meant the police station was shut for the night, he would leave the mobile outside.

The buildings closest to the railway were derelict but not untenanted. He had the impression that the district was as teeming with life in the heat as a corpse. The intermittent light of a single streetlamp, apparently too tall to smash, plucked at the rooms beyond the broken windows and brought shapes that might be alive lurching forward, dodging back. It kept spilling into the tunnel and retreating from the dark. Whatever lay in there was almost asleep if not worse; he couldn't judge whether the scrawny form was twitching with the instability of the dimness or with a trace of life. Sharpe didn't know of any other route to the police station from this side of the track. He ran through the passage, almost colliding with the opposite wall in his eagerness to avoid the denizen. He was within inches of the exit, when a whisper, or at least the fragments of one, halted him. "Give it back."

Had he really heard it? The mobile in his pocket hadn't rung or stirred. As he faltered at the end of the tunnel, he heard footsteps wandering towards him. A woman whom he seemed to recognise was drifting from side to side of the street. He didn't move until he was certain, by which time she was mere yards away. "I believe this belongs to you," he said.

Her eyes glimmered dully with the light across the railway as she turned to look, first at him and then at the mobile. "I've got one," she mumbled.

"You wanted this. You've asked for it often enough."

"I've never."

"Then who's been calling," Sharpe demanded, "if not you?"

An uneasy glint began to surface in her drugged eyes. "She used to. She told me she was shooting up when she was meant to be at school."

"If it's your daughter you're talking about, I rather think that's your responsibility." Sharpe was provoked into raising his voice over the approaching screech of wheels. "You can't expect us to keep children at school without the support of their parents."

"You're a teacher, are you? Maybe you're the kind that made

her stay away." Just as accusingly, the woman said "She called me when she od'd. She didn't know where she was and I couldn't find her in time."

Sharpe was about to retort to all this, when the woman's gaze strayed past him. Her eyes widened and her face sank inwards from the mouth as she staggered backwards. She grew aware of the car full of boys, and her expression changed. Sharpe didn't know whether she tripped on the kerb or deliberately stepped in front of the vehicle. She sprawled in the roadway in time for the front wheels to crush her legs and her head. Her body jerked as the rear wheels caught her, and then she was utterly still.

As the car put on speed, Sharpe dashed into the road, then turned away hastily, clapping a hand over his mouth. When he was able to speak without choking, he pulled out the mobile and dialled 999. "Woman run over," he gabbled. "Boys on drugs in a car." He gave the location and ended the call and fled into the tunnel.

He was suffering more guilt than he understood. He only knew he didn't want to be linked with the woman's death. The glow from the mobile tinged the walls green and made them quiver nervously as he ran towards the light at the far end. When he glimpsed movement at the foot of the wall midway through the passage, he was able to imagine it was caused by the shaky glimmer. Then the shape produced thin limbs like an awakening spider and floundered towards him. He didn't know whether it seized his ankles with fingernails or needles or the tips of bones. It sounded barely able to produce a whisper that rustled like litter. "Yours now," it said.





# AUDIO DEPRAVATION

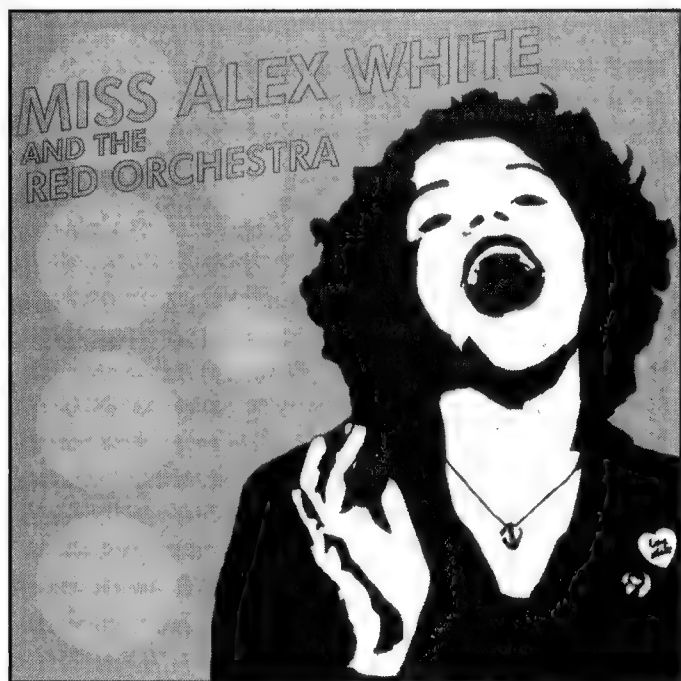


## Jon Hassell – Maarifa Street/Magic Realism 2 (Nyen)

You may not think you know Jon Hassell, but you do. An avant-garde composer and trumpet player, he's released eleven highly influential discs in the last quarter century, and along with Brian Eno, with whom he's played and collaborated, he was essential in the development and eventual mass acceptance of ambient music. During that time, or despite that time, he also began his experiments in what he called Fourth World Music, a pan-ethnic style incorporating advanced electronic techniques. While honing this sound he worked with artists as disparate as k.d. lang, Bjork and Manhattan Transfer, while scoring films like *Primary Colors* and *The End of Violence*. Here he's taken some live performances and cut and pasted bits and pieces of new recordings, and reshaped parts from previous works to create ethereal nourish pieces adorned with Middle Eastern tones and textures. Nowhere is this heard to better effect than on "Open Secret (Paris)," wherein idly plucked strings, Hassell's mournful attenuated trumpet,

and wind-blown chimes are o'erlaid over pulsating dub bass and Dhafer Youssef's melancholy calls to prayer.

## Miss Alex White and The Red Orchestra – Miss Alex White (In The Red)



We so love it when the record company proffers liner notes essentially reviewing the disc for all and sundry. It leaves us with nothing more to do than either deconstruct the review or rip it to pieces. So before doing so, let us leave you with this: this is fine minimalist punk with lovely glam influences. Two guitars, an anxious, skittery drummer, and a singer who moans, mewls and howls like a cat in terminal heat. Very, very sexy. The aforementioned notes ask us to look to The Who and the Modern Lovers. We say that is silly, and ask you to look, instead, to Andrew W.K. and The Stooges. We also say one should start with "Out of Style," a bit of absurdist braggadocio in which Miss White, o'er a piano figure rifled from one of the songs on *Raw Power*, begs, pleads and dares ask the question of whether you love her. If this isn't enough to have you falling head over heels, then proceed immediately

to the following cut, "Picture My Face," a moody yet infectious number, built on two chords, a cheesy little riff, some feedback and a ballsy vocal so heartbreakingly vulnerable as to melt even the hardest of hearts. There's more, and it's all good, but you need to ease into it by taking our advice; otherwise, you're going to find yourself playing the first two or three tunes incessantly to the point of madness.

## Duane Peters – Gunfight (Disaster Records)



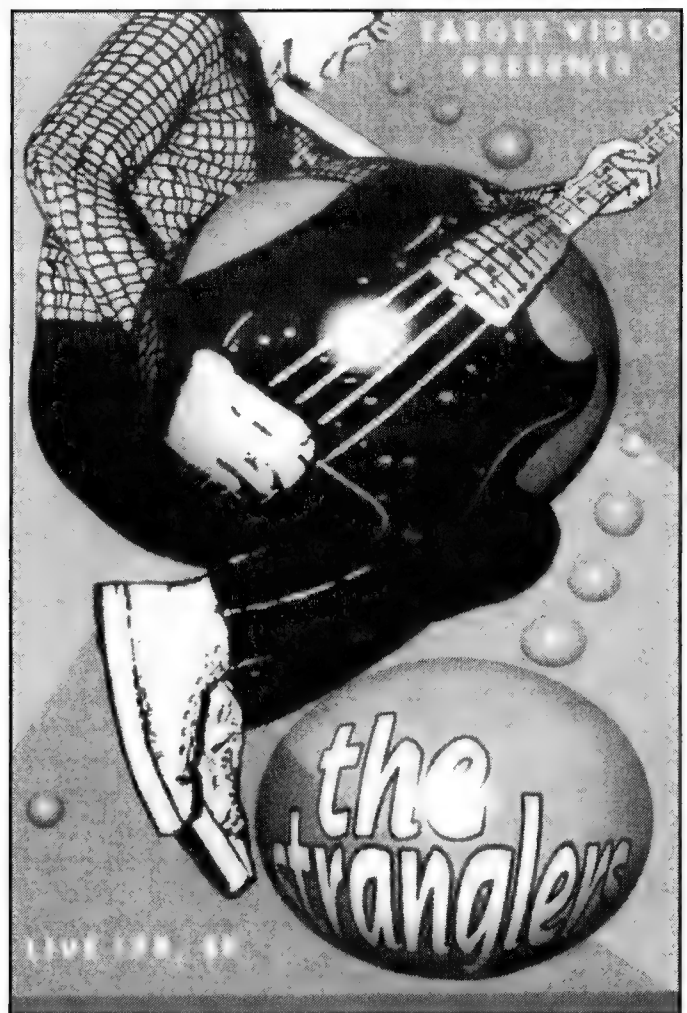
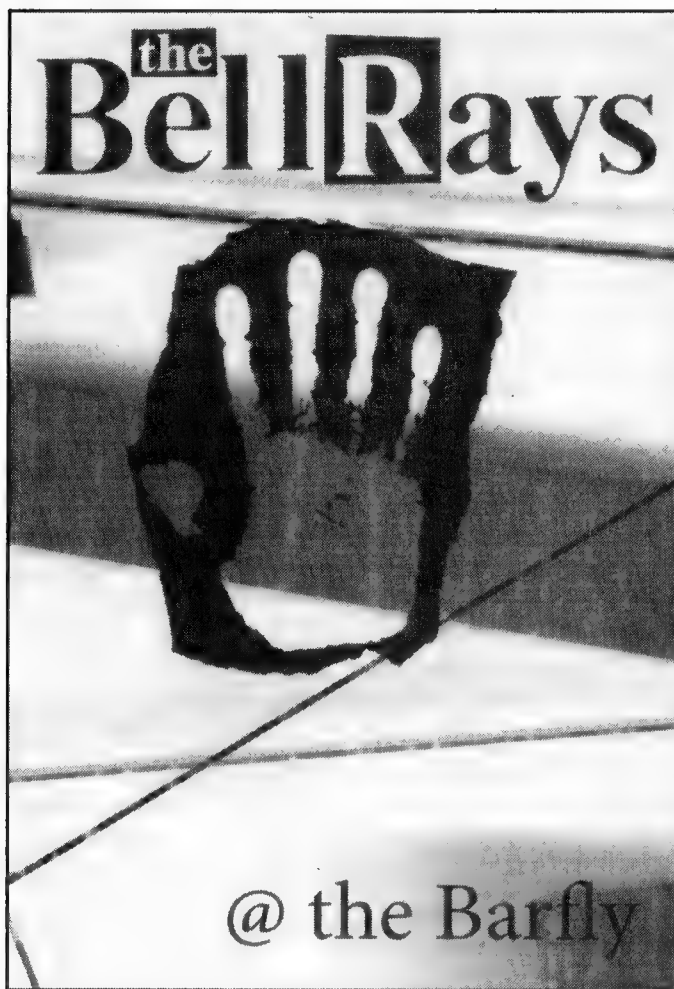
So maybe we're too old to understand why guys like Duane keep putting out discs of old school punk with their buzzing guitars, hoarse vocals and rugby club shouted choruses, but thank God for it because it's catchy, you can dance to it, and it says all the right things about the right things, and you know, both Duane and anyone of the band would share their last beer or cigarette with you if you found yourself without your wallet. The lovely Corey Parks, who brought so indescribably much to Duane's last release, Die Hunns' Legs, is missing in action here, but Duane and company provide enough hostility, infectious hate de vivre, and sheer insanity to make up for her absence. Peters' Marlboro-ravaged voice lessens some of the sting of such incendiary anthems like "Blow My Brains," but when he just puckers up and blows as he does on Radio Birdman's "Breaks My Heart," or "My D.N.A.," it's a pretty impressive display of rage and fury.

## Nashville Pussy – Get Some (Spitfire)

Well, these boys and girls seem to have their focus back after their tours of gay Paree and the like. Getting another hot gal in Karen Cuda to play off lubricious lead-guitarist Ruyter also appears to have kick started things, as Get Some recalls the glory days of not just the band's glorious debut with Corey Parks, but that of obvious forebears like Ted Nugent, Black Oak Arkansas and Grand Funk Railroad. Yeah, those were some of the worst things or simulacrum of things in creation, but these Pussies were too smart, too damn clever to ape the worst excesses of those heavy 70s arena rock bands. What they kinda did was exaggerate the more absurd tropes of the form to the point of absurdity, then jumped off from the carnival aspects of the cock-strutting showmanship of it all with lesbian make-out sessions, fire-eating, and gloriously pointless (but effectual) guitar soloing. And as icing on the gnarly cake, shouting and pointing standing in for meaningful vocal expression. As we all know, however, exaggeration can degenerate easily into burlesque, which, while entertaining, does not make for repeated viewings or, in this case, listening. Thus, the second effort from NP, while listenable, was nowhere near as memorable as the debut. Get Some, the now quartet's fourth effort, is a return to form, a classic bit of sleazy southern hard rock. It's catchy as all hell, chock block full of memorable riffs, classic metal solos and adornments from a rapidly improving Ruyter, and hoarse shouted vocals from Blaine, whose mission here is obviously to put the prime evil back into primitive. In fact, at certain points Blaine appears to dispense with singing all together and just fulminate, which is fine, as most of the songs are about alcoholics, losers or imbecile degenerates, so it kind of fits. Sample inspirational lyric from "Lazy White Boy": A bag of weed and a six pack of bud/I'm like a pig in its own mud. Right friggin' on, Daddy-O! Bonus points, too, for incendiary covers of Ace Frehley's "Snowblind" and Ike Turner's "Nutbush City Limits."

## The BellRays - @the Barfly (DVD from Punkervision)

Some call them funky punk monkeys. Some look at them as art damaged hard rockers. You'll see this, wonder just what the hell is going on, and come away thinking: Aretha Franklin fronting the MC5. Yeah, it's like that, and that's the way it is. A Detroit combo steeped in rock history fronted by a saucy, sassy, sexy



soul stylist (Lisa Kekaula), who knows when to front it, and when to back it up and cool it down. When to ratchet it up, way up, and bring it down. Down to a fine simmer. The bass/drum combo provides a most awesome anchor, but a shout has to go out to lead guitarist Tony Fate, a man of a thousand influences. He's all over the place, willing to drop a feedback-drenched psych solo into the middle of a punk out, or interject some jazzy kernoodling into a perfervid JB-styled workout. You'll have fun listing the many influences, but you'll also come away impressed with how the 'Rays surmount and leave your head ringing with the notion of their being so much more than the sum of all the hot and groovy parts. Verily, this is one of the hippest, rockinest and avant-gardist bands treading the boards today.

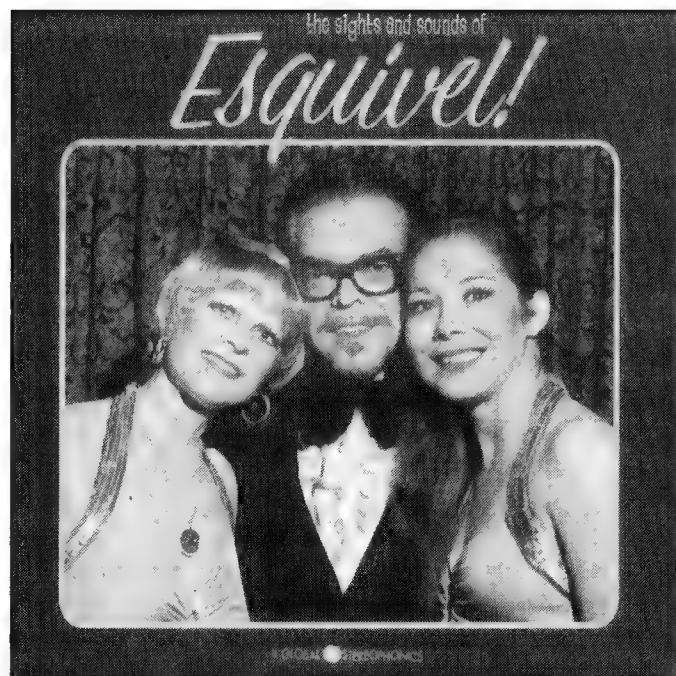
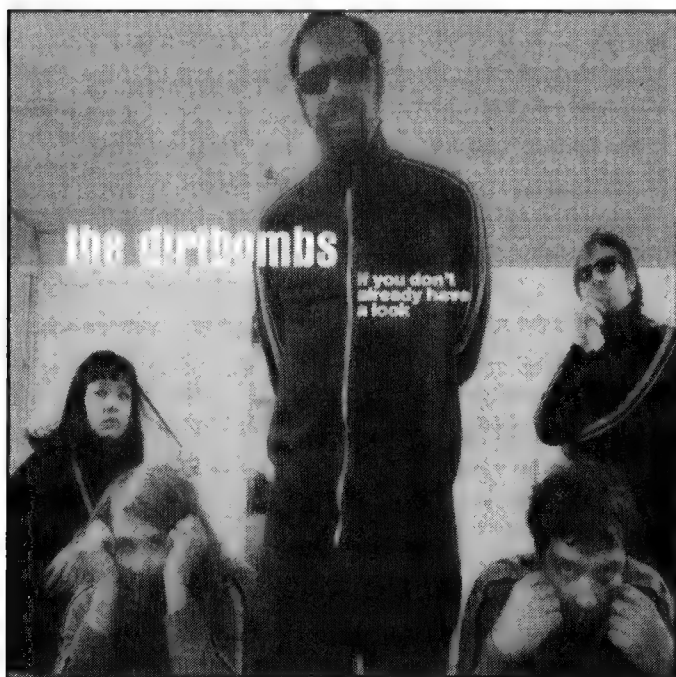
### **The Stranglers – Live '78, SF (MVD Video)**

Yeah, we think classic British punk and it's all Sex Pistols and Clash and The Jam and The Damned, but

no one does much thinking or talking about this lot. Those snarky bass lines, that demented Farfisa, Hugh Cornwall's gruff, mannish and highly menacing vocals: this was punk with a capital P. And they really scared people, especially women, who were outraged at their misogynistic lyrics and openly contemptuous stance toward them. You listened and watched closely, it was obvious it was a joke, but the music and the poses were so convincing it was easy for those not really studying it all (and who does when we're talking rock lyrics) to be horrified. God damn, I mean you got these boorish looking types singing about offing acne-scarred girls and fucking rats in the sewers, while threatening one and all from the stage; it could be pretty frickin' chilling. Unless you caught the references to Trotsky and Percy Bysshe. This disc, way way too short at thirty minutes and seven songs, shows the quartet at the peak of their powers, and, while they would go on to produce a number of fascinating and highly arresting lps and 45s, they were never truly as interesting as here, when they were playing up their thugishness for all it was worth. There's got to be more of this stuff out there and if there is, we need to see and hear it.

## The Dirtbombs – If You Don't Already Have A Look (In The Red)

Or, rather, if you haven't heard one of the most adept and prolific garage band playing it for the cheap. Shows cost next to nothing, dozens of singles, a couple of full lengths out there and Mick ain't hardly chargin' nothin'. You talk about your White Stripes and your Hives and Turbo Negros, and they can't touch Mr. Collins. Mick Collins, courtesy of Detroit and he's African American, so he knows all about what garage, (i.e., white boys trying to sing r&b) is all about. And he thinks it's cool. Goes them one better and tries to do a black guy trying to do a white guy doing a black guy. Works out great, listening to him deconstruct, hell, destroy Stevie Wonder's "Maybe Your Baby," or Lou Rawls' "Natural Man" or Smokey Robinson's "I'll Be In Trouble." A caucasian would have been too respectful. Mick poops all over it and turns them both into drunken rave-ups. Not surprising in a band with two bassists and two drummers. That's a lot of noise. Fearless leader rises to the challenge by refusing to sing in key and to solo – well it's somebody playing lead – in all manner of crazy styles. Most of them are of apiece with the songs, but a lot has nothing to do with that which has come before. Yeah, Mick and his Dirtbombs like to fuck around. While taking on r&b, pop, psychedelia, punk . . . Alright, enough, we're talkin' high energy, artistic, devil-may-care approaches to the entire popular manner of song. You've got to be good to take that on. And you've got to be better to keep it interesting. Mr. Collins' ain't bad so we ask you to check out this two disc, fifty-two



cut set collecting all the singles, b-sides and covers this true force of nature has produced as, get this, an offshoot to the primary career project he calls The Gories.

## Esquivel – The Sights and Sounds of Esquivel! (Bar None)

The international piano and sounds of Esquivel recorded live before . . . no one. That's right, in this delightfully loopy set, Esquivel and his six piece orchestra recreate their nightclub show, replete with the incomparable Juan Garcia dapperly addressing thin air and the combo graciously acknowledging dubbed applause. Yes, madams and messeurs, space-age bachelor pad music at its finest, put down by the man who practically invented the genre. So what we are graced with is lovely lush lounge lilts lovingly decorated with come-hither gal choruses going ohhhh-ohhhh-ohhhh, or sometime zoooooooo-zoooo-zoo, or pow pow powwwwwww, rumba rhythms and Babaloo melodies. There's a marvelous contempt behind it all; it's entertainment with a barely disguised sneer, a smile disguising the recherche reach for the knife inside the jacket. One just don't pound the keyboards so indecorously during "Rhapsody In Blue" - unless one has murder on one's mind. There might be a language barrier keeping the singer from effectively interpreting a song as simplistic as "Delta Dawn," but to perform it as if it were an aria from La Traviata is to display hauteur at its most extreme. Kitsch at its most refined always expresses



heightened disdain for its audience; on Sights and Sounds, celebrates this with highly competent musicianship gleefully courting the vulgar and inconsequential. Bravo! Brava!!

## **Mike and the Ravens - Nevermore: Plattsburgh '62 & Beyond (Dionysus)**

One of the best arguments for warts'n'all rock'n'roll archaeology is made by this two-disc, forty-song compilation focusing on Mike and the Ravens. Formed in Plattsburgh, New York, lead singer Mike Brassard, lead guitarist Stephen Boldgett, bassist Bo Blodgett, and drummer Pete Young played the der rigeur mix of early '60's garage rock and surf. Unlike most bands of their era, the Ravens wrote strong original material which they delivered with verve and skill.

Brassard's tough-but-tender vocal style encompassed folk sincerity ("I've Taken All I Can") and doo-wop falsetto release ("Mr. Heartbreak"). Unfortunately, only a fraction of their rocking sound ("Biggest Fool Around") was captured by Empire Records, their only official label. As a result, the Ravens's sparkling garage band chemistry is best exemplified by the fuzzy sounding, but youthfully brilliant live recordings ("Can't You Feel the Pain," "One of These Days") and demos (the Bobby Bare influenced "Ballad of a Square") that comprise the meat of disc one.

Whether rocking live at the skating emporium known as Rollerland ("No Man's Land," "Two Tone Jenny"), working up polished tracks ("Goodbye to Mary Jane," "Oobie Dooby Do"), or just screwing around ("Pete's Turkish Delight"), the Ravens exhibited creative passion and humor galore. Oft-times they combined the influences of Dick Dale ("Go Home") and Bo Diddley ("Riptide") to fashion danceable club rock. Further, a few recordings ("Baby Please Don't Go" "I'll Get it From You") clearly anticipate the British Invasion sounds that would eventually shut down many aspiring American rockers.

Disc two is less compelling as rock'n'roll, but fascinating from a historical vantage point. Trying to get a foothold in the socially relevant late '60's, core members Brassard and Blodgett recorded in several different combinations. As Stephen Sargent & The Pride, they laid down folk-pop for the Compass label ("Grey Eyes Watching Me."). Signed briefly to Decca, they adopted a more highly produced consciousness-raising sound ("I Could Hear the Grass Growing") as Fire &

Brimstone. Working as the Camel's Hump, they veered into Southern Rock ("Birmingham") via psychedelia ("Look") with great conviction.

Prolific, if not exactly successful, Blodgett and Brassard soldiered on in such '70's folk-rock oriented contingents as the Front Burner ("Lights of San Francisco") and Texas Driver ("Georgia Plains") before fading from the scene. Blodgett re-emerged during the late '90's with some smart acoustic pop demos ("Motorboat") before he and Brassard reformed the Ravens in 2004 ("No Love For You"), with a less ballsy sound

Vintage commercials and political audio clips help identify the various eras the music represents, and a creatively rendered booklet captures the band's quirky innocence and professional chronology. The result is a remarkable portrait of a great unknown band emerging from the odyssey of history as genre heroes. (Ken Burke)

## **The Shirelles Anthology - Will You Love Me Tomorrow (Castle)**

The Shirelles's catchy songs, gospel fed harmonies, and peerless ability to voice the concerns of young womanhood ushered in pop music's era of female empowerment. The best of their Scepter recordings joyfully reside on this highly recommended 60-song, 2-CD set.

Naturally all the big hits - "Dedicated to the One I Love," "Soldier Boy," "Mama Said," "Will You Love Me Tomorrow," "Everybody Loves a Lover," "Foolish Little Girl," and "Baby It's You" - are included. Subtly remastered, they've never sounded better. Aided by a succession of great studio producers - Stan Green, Luther Dixon, Van McCoy, Leiber & Stoller - the Shirelles demonstrated an uncanny knack for one-upping their girl group contemporaries. Indeed such life-lesson ditties as "Voice of Experience," "Stop the Music," and "Hard Times" cemented their roles as the vulnerable big sisters of their genre. Moreover, the grittier, lesser known recordings such as the Ray Charles flavored "Boys" and "Love is a Swingin' Thing," and Marvelettes-inspired "Big John," provide the best settings for lead singer Shirley Alston's timeless tears-behind-the-sass approach.

Mired in legal problems and commercially stunted by the British Invasion acts dominating the radio, the Shirelles wracked up minor hits with "Sha-La-La," "Tonight You're Gonna Fall in Love With Me," and "Are You

Still My Baby.” Although their chart clout waned, their willingness to experiment never did. Bravely mixing Spectroresque Adult Contemporary ala “His Lips Get in the Way” and “Thank You Baby” with justifying-my-man anthems like “Get Rid of Him” and “That Boy is Messin’ Up My Mind,” they transformed pleading teen anthems into a sexy art form.

Their post-1965 work embraced trendier pop arrangements, resulting in a salsa-flavored rendition of “Que Sera Sera” and a pounding remake of their debut hit “I Met Him On a Sunday.” The soul aesthetic of the late-‘60’s should have been a nice fit for the Shirelles. Certainly the Motownish “Don’t Go Home (My Little Darlin’),” “Look Away,” and the brassy “Last Minute Miracle” do sound great today, but by then they had been typed as an oldies act.

The fold-out paper liner notes by Mick Patrick and Malcolm Baumgart are bolstered with chart positions and vintage pictures, and the music remains undeniably great. If you’re looking for something beyond the standard greatest hits package by these undisputed girl group queens, this is the one to get. [www.sanctuaryrecordingsgroup.co.uk](http://www.sanctuaryrecordingsgroup.co.uk). (Ken Burke)

## **Barracudas - Barracudas (NDN)**

This’ll be the first of a decent handful of reunion or comeback shows/CDs reviewed in this issue. The Barracudas, formed in the UK in the late 70’s, put out somewhere between 4 (if you’re counting official studio releases) and 15 LPs (if all compilations and live releases count) from 1981 until this brand new CD. Centered around the distinctive vocals of Jeremy Gluck and the guitar stylings and songwriting of Robin Wills, their sound included surf music, folk-rock (notably a 12-string Byrds influence), and a massive dose of the Flamin’ Groovies, which was compounded in the early 80’s when ex-Groovie Chris Wilson joined their ranks as 2<sup>nd</sup> vocalist/guitarist. Above all else, Gluck and Wills have always been rabid fans of great rock & roll music. They have, over the years, written for Sounds, Bucketful of Brains, Next Big Thing, Mojo, and other similar magazines, doing interviews, record reviews and various articles.....so, needless to say, they have great taste in music, as their own material reflects. This new CD, with Gluck, Wills and Wilson joined by a new rhythm section, picks up where they left off 13 years ago (Wait For Everything, their last studio LP, came out in ‘92). In fact, it’s their best effort to me since their debut,

Drop Out With...., which came out in ‘81. Songs like the opener “Poor White Trash,” “What You Want Is What You Get,” “Price You Pay,” and “Not That Kind” are all vintage ‘Cudas material. There are an oddity or two, notably the catchy first single from the new album, “Don’t Ever Say It Can’t Be So,” with its Spector/Roy Wood wall of sound production, but it’s all good. The band has reunited for several shows in Europe so far. Hopefully, they’ll make it to these shores before they call it quits again. Welcome back, guys! (John Oliver)

## **Big Star - In Space (Rykodisc)**

About 10 years ago, ex-Big Stars Alex Chilton (newly sober) and Jody Stephens joined forces with two of the Posies (Ken Stringfellow and Jon Auer), to reunite the legendary band for a couple of live shows. Big Star’s reputation has grown considerably over the past 30+ years. Their first 2 LPs, #1 Record (1972) and Radio City (1974), usually make various critics’ lists of best-ever power pop LPs, and their 3<sup>rd</sup> LP, “Sister Lovers” (recorded in 1975, released in ‘78) is one of those weird, pharmaceutically-wired, very personal raw jagged nerve types of albums, the type you either love or hate with a passion. (Whatever Chilton was on during the recording of this album, I’d like some, please!) Anyhow....for whatever reason, the foursome that’s been playing as Big Star recently went into the studio to attempt to recreate the magic one more time. How successful were they? Considering the staggering amount of talent here, especially in songwriting and singing, as well as a 30 year wait, I find the result to be disappointing. They could have released a superb EP had they stopped at the first 4 songs (“Dony,” “Lady Sweet,” “Best Chance We’ve Ever Had,” and “Turn My Back On The Sun”) and tossed in “Hung Up With Summer.” Unfortunately, though, the remaining 7 songs sound like they were written at the last minute in the studio, with the lyrics possibly improvised as they were recording. Filler, in other words, and pretty darn reminiscent of Mr. Chilton’s wackier solo efforts.....I’m sure the disco homage, “Love Revolution” will draw the most outrage from their loyal fans, but at least it sounds like they had fun recording it. With Chilton’s, Big Star’s (and the Posies’) pedigrees, I guess they’re entitled to do what they damn well want in the studio. While it’s good to have them back, I think I’ll wait for any upcoming live shows in lieu of wearing out my CD player listening to this seemingly half-hearted effort....or really good effort for half a CD, if I want to put a positive spin on things! (John Oliver)

## **Roky Erickson & The Explosives - Live at the Austin City Limits Festival, 9/24/05 (Bootleg)**

And speaking of reunions....this here's an excellent one! The Evil One himself, Mr. Roky Erickson, has returned to the living, and, backed by his former accomplices The Explosives (actually 2/3 of the Austin-based new wave/punk band - Cam King and our buddy Freddie Krc are on guitar and drums, respectively, and Ronnie Barnett of The Muffs is on bass, in place of Walter Collie), played a full-length comeback set at the recent Austin City Limits Festival. Roky moved back to Austin a couple of years ago, where he's living near his younger brother Sumner. Rumor has it his physical, mental and emotional health have improved, and he's even gotten a drivers license. While he's played the occasional short acoustic show over the past few years, this Austin gig represented his first show with a real band, kicking out the jams, taking names, and really reliving his old, 13<sup>th</sup> Floor Elevators and fire-breathing solo past. While his voice isn't as strong as it used to be, he still gets the songs across well, and the band's a stone killer. This was an excellent show, from the introduction by the "future Governor of Texas," Kinky Friedman, to Rocky's last encore of "I Walked With A Zombie," with all of his big hits known in (including "Red Temple Prayer," "Don't Shake Me Lucifer," "The Interpreter," and, of course, the Elevators' "You're Gonna Miss Me."). It'll definitely be worth a flight or two out to Austin to check out future live shows by these guys! (John Oliver)

## **Bob Mosley - True Blue (Taxim Records - Import)**

While not a reunion, this definitely counts as a major comeback for Bob Mosley, bassist/songwriter/ singer extraordinaire for Moby Grape, the 60's SF band that refuses to die. Bob, also a Brut interviewee several years ago (Issue # 34 or was it 35?) was last heard from on record on 1990's The Melvilles, later re-issued as The Legendary Grape, which was essentially Moby Grape playing under an assumed name (to avoid a lawsuit from their former manager-from-Hell, Matthew Katz, who claimed to own the name Moby Grape). I last saw Bob in 2003 at the since-burned down club Henflings in Ben Lomond, California, waiting to go on stage and play with ex-Grape guitarist Jerry Miller. Jerry, unfortunately, neglected to call for Bob his first 2 sets, and Mr. Mosley disappeared. He mentioned to me

earlier that night that he was in the process of recording a new LP, which he was hoping to release within the next year or so. Here it is, in December 2005, on the German Taxim label, which has released CDs by ex-Moby Grape Peter Lewis as well. While Bob's booming voice was once capable of knocking down walls at 50 feet, it's weakened a bit over the years...but it's also aged like fine whiskey, and, if anything, gotten more expressive. He's still more than capable of shouting the blues here (which he does throughout this CD), but he really shines on the slower material now (the re-recording of Moby Grape's "Never" and "Lazy Me," "Just Like A Fool," and "To The Sea"). The band - Bob on guitars and bass, ex-Doobie Brother Dale Ockerman on keyboards and slide guitar, and Sons of Champlin drummer James Preston, is rock solid throughout, with no fancy solos - the emphasis is on Bob's voice, as it should be. A very welcome return! Now....since Moby Grape just recently won the right to use the band name again.....Bob, Jerry, Peter - come on guys, time's a wastin'! (John Oliver)

## **Raspberries - Live at BB Kings, NYC (7/23 and 7/24/05) and the House of Blues, Atlantic City (9/17/05) (Bootlegs)**

Dammit, you're thinking - Oliver's gone and reviewed yet another f\*\*\*ing reunion!!! Yeah, and this may very well be the best of the bunch! The history of the Cleveland-based Raspberries is a very strange one. They put out a handful of perfect pop singles/45's in the 70's ("Go All The Way" being the best known, but also "I Wanna Be With You," "Let's Pretend," and "Overnight Sensation"), channeling the sound and spirit of the Beatles, Beach Boys, Left Banke, and Byrds, in addition to four albums of damn good to excellent quality (with the last one, Starting Over, named by Rolling Stone as one of the best of 1974). They were also great live, but, aside from the one big single, their records never sold that much. Once the band dissolved in '74, they became best known as Eric Carmen's former band.... he of the huge hair, Barry Manilow-ish singles (e.g., "All By Myself") and Dirty Dancing fame ("Hungry Eyes"). While Eric's always been a huge musical talent, much like Paul McCartney, once he got out from under his best known band, his music started getting a bit wimpy. Imagine, if you will, a Macca whose music became 5 times more popular than the Beatles, and you'll get the picture here. Accordingly, I approached these Raspberries reunion gigs (with the four original members, who did their first 3 LPs) with caution....

hoping they wouldn't turn into Eric Carmen solo shows midway through. My fears were groundless - aside from playing some covers that showed their roots (Beatles, Searchers, Byrds, Who) and "It's Cold Outside," the top 40 single of the Choir (pre-Raspberries band for 3 of the 4 originals), they've done just Raspberries material... and have played it damn near perfectly, I might add. The impeccable vocal harmonies, jangly guitar work and thundering drums are all there in full force, aided and abetted by 3 other musicians (named "The Overdubs") who help them recreate the recordings to a tee. The shows have been truly great band efforts, with bassist Dave Smalley and guitarist Wally Bryson taking the occasional turns on lead vocals in addition to Eric C., whose voice is still a magnificent instrument on both the rockers and the ballads. I've seen 4 of their reunion shows to date.....and I have 3 of them on audience tapings, which prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that these guys are still one of the very best bands in the world. Now...they need to strike while the iron is hot, and get out a live CD or DVD. If they play anywhere near you, go see them. (John Oliver)

## **Real Losers - Music For Funsters (Trick Knee)**

This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> full-length LP/CD by the UK 3 piece band that has been called the "British Guitar Wolf".... more for their love of sheer noise than any real musical similarities, although honestly, it's kinda hard to tell. These guys (well, 2 guys and a girl - their drummer, named Hot Dog) are so fucking noisy, it's difficult to make out any semblance of a melody on most songs, at least upon first listen. Upon repeated listenings, they sound more to me like a British Teenager than Guitar Wolf....not a bad thing, in my opinion. I do wonder, though, am I just getting too old for rock & roll this loud and noisy? I bet they're great live, but I also bet I'd be twice as old as anyone else in the crowd where they're playing. Getting old is a bitch.....(John Oliver)

## **Regulations - Regulations (Havoc) Regulations - Electric Guitar (Havoc)**

The Regulations, formed out of the ashes of two Swedish skate/thrash bands, Epileptic Terror Attack (ETA) and The Dead Ones, have taken the new band in a different direction - late 70's Southern Cal punk. We're talking the Circle Jerks (with the singer reminding

me a lot of Keith Morris), Channel 3, the Germs and early Black Flag, with perhaps a smidgen of balls-to-the-wall R&R like AC/DC tossed in for good measure. On the one hand, not very original, but on the other... a breath of fresh air! Hopefully, this signals a bit of a new musical direction for Swedish R&R as well, which has been somewhat mired in the Radio Birdman/MC5/Stooges 70's groove for the past several years (Hellacopters, Nomads, Demons, Mensen, Backyard Babies, Sewergrooves, etc.). Not that I have anything against those bands, but a little variety's a good thing. Electric Guitar appears to be a compilation of various 45s and EP's that the band's put out over the past couple of years, while the eponymous CD is a bunch of recordings done in early '05. Catchy, loud, obnoxious 2 minute punk rock songs....I like it! The guys at Reptilian Records in Baltimore recommended these 2 CDs to me, and I recommend them to our readers. (John Oliver)

## **Sky Saxon - Transparency (Jungle - Import)**

Sky Saxon was last seen at the Las Vegas Rockaround in September 2004, making a damn nuisance of himself, accosting people in the merchandise room, unexpectedly jumping on stage with the A-Bones, and finally getting tossed from the building by security. Oh, and he performed the first half of his set with the latest version of The Seeds while wearing a Mexican wrestling mask! In spite of his looniness, he still managed to put out a decent record last year, Red Planet, with the latest incarnation of The Seeds, which is probably the closest he's come to capturing the chaotic psychedelic garage sound of his 60's records. While in England last year, he also put together a Brit band, featuring members of the Barracudas, Scientists, and Spaceman 3, to play a couple of gigs and record a new studio album. One of the disks here is that album, and a bonus DVD disk of a gig at the Dirty Water Club is also included. Sorry to say, the new studio CD is big step down from Red Planet. The songs are basically all 3 chord garage blasts that sound like a bad night at a karaoke bar, with some drunk trying to sound like Jim Morrison via "Riders On The Storm"....but then again, Morrison allegedly got a lot of his singing chops from copying Saxon back in the 60's, so who knows? Nonetheless, the new songs, all originals, save an embarrassingly bad altered take on "My Little Red Book," are very basic and very boring. The live set is pretty much like what I remembered from Las Vegas last year...although I was extremely drunk most of that event. Saxon's half-Morrison/half-Johnny



Cash croaking doesn't really sound much like the Sky S. of "Pushing Too Hard" or "Can't Seem To Make You Mine." Save your money and buy Red Planet instead of this one. (John Oliver)

## **Various Artists - One Kiss Can Lead To Another - Girl Groups (Rhino box set)**

Christ almighty!!! If this isn't the best box set I've bought in the last 5 years or so, it certainly has been the hardest to get out of my CD player! Rhino has taken the cream of the crop - the best songs by various 60's girl groups and female singers....but NOT their biggest hits in most cases. Herein lies the key to the excellence of this box set - it isn't a bunch of top 10 singles that we're all sick of from having heard them thousands of times. In lieu of "Leader Of The Pack" or "Give Him

A Great Big Kiss" by the Shangri-Las, for example, we get "Out In The Streets" (recently resurrected by the reunited NY Dolls) and "The Train From Kansas City".....better songs, in my opinion. Ditto, "Keep Your Hands Off My Bay" and "The Trouble With Boys" by Little Eva, instead of "Loco-Motion." We're getting a big boatload of should-have-been million sellers.... and, in my opinion, there isn't one duff cut in this entire box! Where else can you hear the original versions of the Hollies' "I Can't Let Go" (Evie Sands), the Denny Laine-fronted Moody Blues' "Go Now" (Bessie Banks), and Betty Everett's/Linda Ronstandt's "You're No Good" (Dee Dee Warwick, Dionne's little sister) back to back to back? Where else can you get a great booklet with so many old photos of processed big hair, and the whole package in a hat box container? Buy this box set; you'll love it! (John Oliver)

# Zine Reviews



As everyone at Brutarian is addicted to love, we'd be very remiss if we failed to tell one and all about **BLOWFISH**, the classiest adult fun catalog extant. Believe it or don't, we discovered it in the classified section of American's leading intellectual monthly, The New York Review of Books. We also found that you can "blow" up to \$150 dollars an hour talking about Kierkegaard and strap-ons with Harvard-educated women but never mind. This is porn for people with discretion and taste; that is, discerning individuals looking for pleasure, not cheap sensation. It's a fine line, we know, but give a bit of thought to the difference between getting drunk on a cheap bottle of dago red and sipping a fine Pouilly Fuisse and we think you'll catch our drift. These catalogers are highly educated, thoughtful hedonists who live for this stuff. Toward that end, and to insure every item they carry is of the very best quality, the staff personally inserts every butt plug ("Our tester could barely speak when it first slipped in . . ."), carefully peruses every fuck book and DVD, and indulgently subjects all lubes and semi-edibles to a careful taste test. All right! All right! We're talking sex maniacs here; still, these are sex maniacs with Ivy League diplomas. They know Caravaggio. They

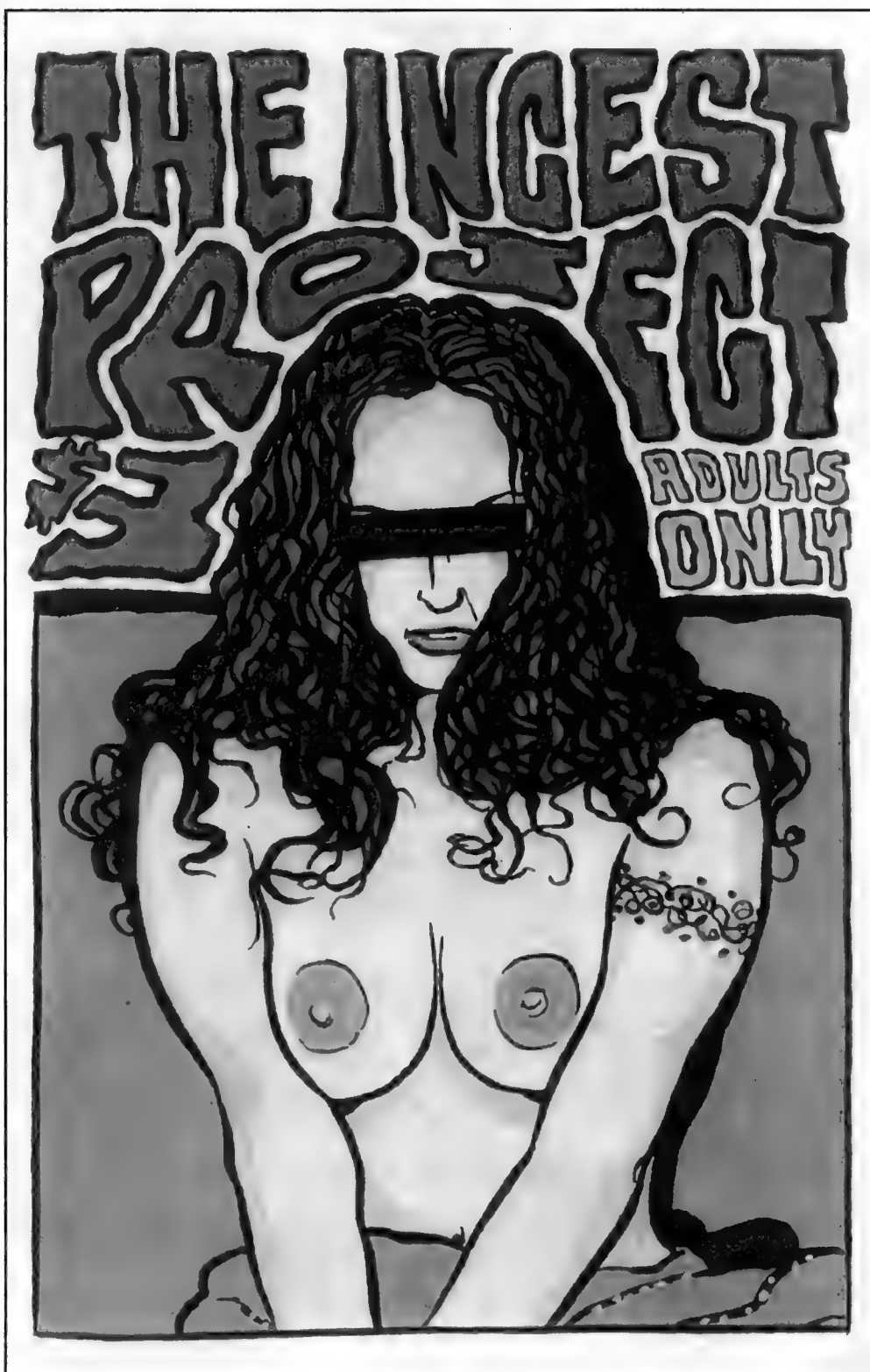
## The Blowfish Catalog



know Henry Miller. More importantly, they know that Crisco is necessary for anal fisting. The catalog makes for great reading as well. Laugh yourself silly learning why the latest piece of molded plastic is heaven scent, rub your genitals raw wondering how a photographic study devoted entirely to feet could result in such a piece of inspired prose, tickle your anus and ask if you are having fun yet. Whatever you do, just know that Blowfish is the bomb for intellectual dysfunctionals of every stripe. ([www.blowfish.com](http://www.blowfish.com))

And while we're on the subject of perversion, let's talk about the latest project from Cinema Sewer's Robin Bougie. We're not sure if poor sales of his long running zine has driven him to this or if he's finally had that nervous breakdown he's been long promising, but his latest effort, **THE INCEST PROJECT**, isn't likely to win poor Robin any new fans. That's right, we're talking about sexual relations between relatives. Real close relatives. Robin posted a notice on a chat board asking for interview subjects and soon found himself with a number of willing participants. He edited a few of the more "interesting internet Q&A sessions and voila, our little stapled and Xerox study."

To be fair, although admittedly, that's rather difficult with a publication like this, Mr. Bougie approaches it all from a freedom of expression viewpoint. So don't look for pictures and expect questions, as the Review is far more interested in sociological and

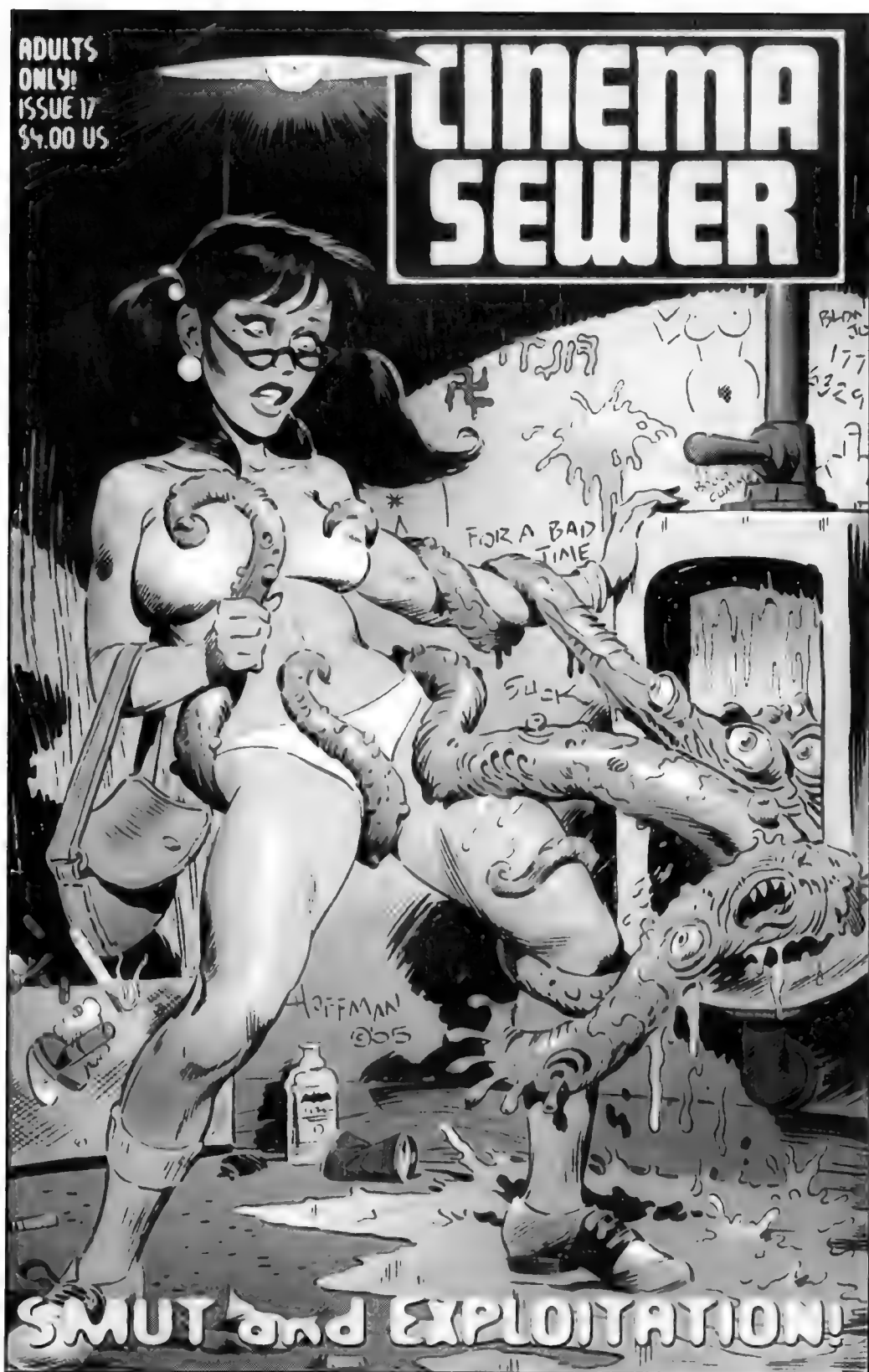


psychological impact of such vile practices.. Still, our publisher does occasionally let his libido get the best of him and so you'll find some of these brain-damaged subjects revealing some rather gnarly details. Though from a commercial standpoint, it makes sense; you have to throw in a little sex talk because who's going to buy a title like this if

it reads like a Supreme Court brief. And besides, you know, deep in your heart of hearts, you really hear about what it's like to get an enema from your mommy, right? Right? No, wrong, sicko. That's very wrong and that's also the reason we're not telling you how to go about getting this thing. If that annoys you, we suggest you phone your local psychiatric clinic and ask them to commit you. For those of you not willing to go so far, just try and remember that your mom is not a potential date and that your sister's dirty underwear needs to stay in the hamper.

Robin Bougie also publishes our fave cinema trash zine, **CINEMA SEWER**, a comic-sized publication that's, well, kind of a porno punk take-off on comics. There's a lot of wonderful material in here but unless you share Robin's enthusiasm for pornography, you might find yourself getting a bit bored with things. Taken in large dollops, porn offers little aside from the initial frisson. Mr. Bougie, bless him, remains blissfully unaware of this and that's what lends his efforts such charm. His critiques of the X-rated fare and his interviews with sex-industry actresses and workers beguile because of the essential worthlessness of the subject matter. What can one meaningfully say

about an anal double penetration scene? Nothing. Thus to ask about it is to ask about nothing and so make yourself ridiculous. The same holds true when discussing a film like *Disco Dolls*, the almost total absence of plot, character development,





# **STEAMSHOVEL PRESS**

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**IN THIS ISSUE:** JOHN JUDGE ON THE 9/11 OMISSIONS; JIM HOUGAN ON DEEP THROAT BEDFELLOWS; ADAM GORIGHTLY ON OCCULT SOCIETIES IN SANTA CRUZ; GREG BISHOP VS. MICHAEL SALLA ON UFO EXOPOLITICS; 50 YEARS OF AREA 51; X. SHARKS DESPOT ON NORTH KOREA; KENN THOMAS; URI DOWBENKO...much more!

**NUMBER 22, PRICE: \$7**

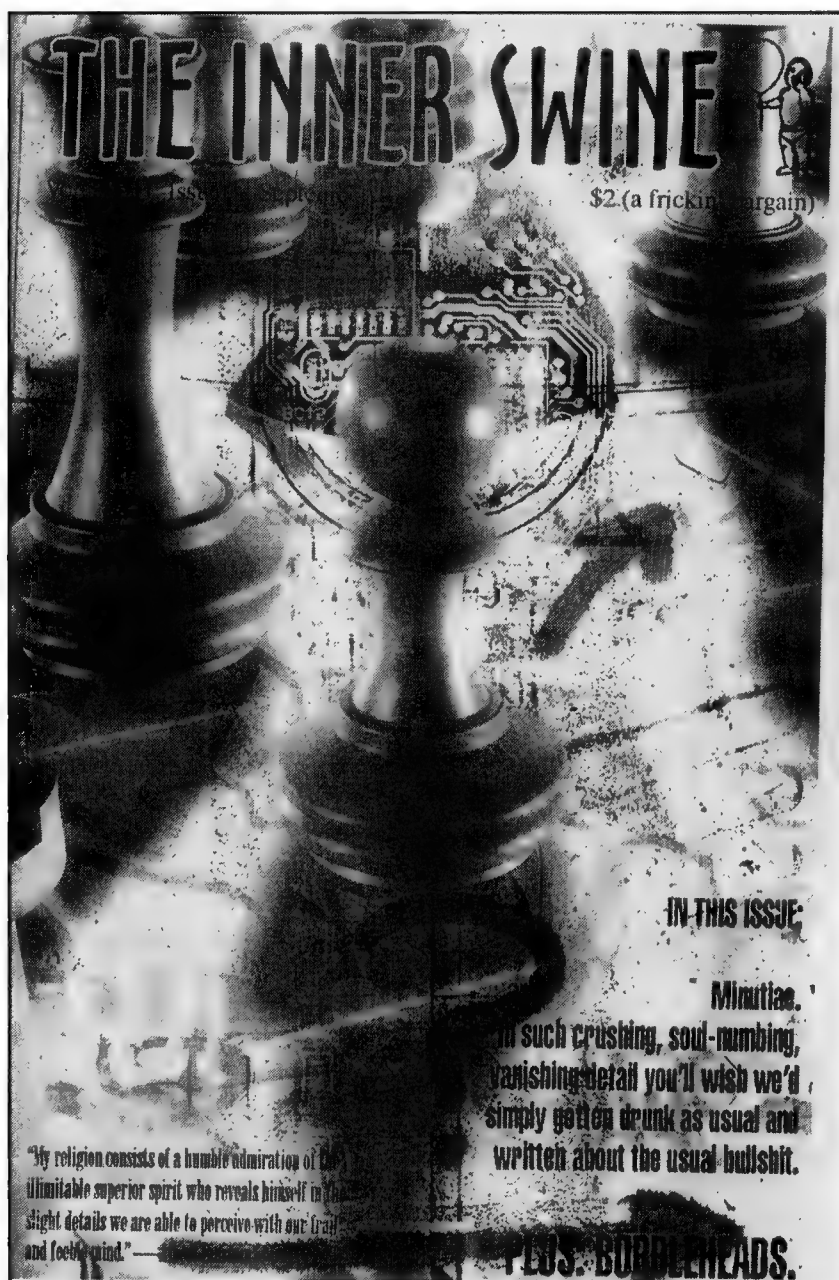
theme, leaves you only with the almost totally interchangeable sex scenes to talk about. It's intellectual dialogue reduced to the absurd and meaningless. Yet it works because Bougie sets it in a cut and paste world with primitive lettering, playfully obscene drawings and exploitive film advertisements. We're floating with the flotsam, so why not The History of Bukkake or an interview with the maker of Waterpower aka The Enema Bandit. It's garbage, sure, but put in the proper context, as with Cinema Sewer, its fetid scent allures and intoxicates the dark hidden side of us we work so desperately to keep to ourselves (Four smackers to Robin, 440 East 5<sup>th</sup> Ave., Vancouver BC, V5T-1N5, Canada.)

All conspiracy. No theory. And sometimes, as with the case of columnist, John Kaminski who believes the Holocaust is pure malarkey, no facts. But don't get us wrong, we know Oswald was the patsy, we think it's obvious Bush and his cronies lied about the dangers posed by Hussein, and we're pretty sure Elvis remains fat, happy and at large in Kalamazoo, Michigan. So we're big fans of conspiracy. The bigger, the better and **STEAMSHOVEL PRESS** shovels the shit on some big ones. The latest ish has assassin researcher John Judge giving us the lowdown on 9/11 and subsequent Commission obfuscations, proof positive that Deep Throat is not the all-American defender of First Amendment rights we were told he was and – hold on to your hats, ladies and gentlemen, the shocking truths about Tuesday Weld's secret Illuminati cult as revealed by none other than a direct descendent of Jesus Christ. Yeah, it gets a bit thick here sometimes, but it's never less than entertaining and the editors annotate and footnote throughout so you can check their sources. Which, in some cases, may be a federal prison or a loony bin, but with someone like Judge, it ain't. (Seven dollars to SP, Box 210553, St. Louis, MO 63121.)

There are many zine guides out in the underground but few are as cheap as **XEROGRAPHY DEBT**. That's meant as a compliment, because packed in its sixty pages is all manner of wondrous info

about strange and unusual publications, most of which cannot be found anywhere other than the publisher's apartment. A lot of the reviewers are librarians and/or semi-professional writers so the literary quotient is rather high. So much so, we must confess to being rather queasy about voicing our opinion in regards to this quarterly. Ah, the heck with it, we'll throw caution to the wind and let you know that in addition to being highly readable, the contributors were obviously screened with care by editor Davida Gypsy Breier, as the recommendations are generally right on the money. While XD eschews negative reviews, they weed out the good from the terrific. If we have a complaint, it's that there's a little too much overlap here; some zines are given the thumbs up as many as





everything, even the language we are using right at this very minute to talk to you, is and may be. Too many words for which we must apologize as we were addressing the subject of our publisher's operative term. We got bogged down. In the minutia. And that come to think of it, is the theme of the latest issue of Swine. All the issues have a theme, but the real fun of each and every one is watching Somers wandering off and then belatedly getting back to said theme. A lot of times, he ignores everything all together to allow his wife, The Duchess to weigh in with whatever is on her mind, or just to break off into story. Mr. Somers' doesn't like the endings to his stories but we do. We think you'll like everything about this wild and out-of-control journal of Somersness. (Two smackers, a bargain for such density, to Jeff, Box 3024, Hoboken, NJ 07030.)

Are you the kind of guy or gal who drinks so much the cops set up a DUI checkpoint in your driveway? Have you often thought how much fun it would be to try and wring out a rum cake? If so, then have we the magazine for you: **MODERN DRUNKARD**, from which the preceding jokes were purloined. But MD is so much more. It's a humor magazine. It's an educational magazine—learn the art of the shot, get a gander at great female drunks in history, peruse booze in the news. You get poetry, fiction, satire, rants, diatribes, all

centering on alcohol and inebriation. Artistically laid out on soft silky paper suitable for wiping the drool or vomit from your chin, and replete with lascivious and highly creative ads for those times when you want to read but just can't focus, the publishers have created the perfect read for chronic alcoholics of every stripe. It's genius, really. Pure sodden, hateful genius. (Back issues are four bills, 178 Denargo Market, Denver, CO 80216)

four or five times. We don't need that, but we do need more columns especially when they're as entertaining as Jeff Somers' musings and Sean D. Stewart's history of Oi! Zines. (Three simoleons to Ms. Breier, Box 963, Havre de Grace, MD 21078.)

We don't know what to call **THE INNER SWINE**. It could be a perzine as Mr. Somers talks about himself an awful lot. It could be a rant zine as Mr. Somers is very angry and often drunk, and often quite upset that the world is such a messy place, and no one recognizes his solipsistic genius. We do, and we'd like to add that the operative term for everything Mr. Somers does is get them laughing. Or get them thinking. About how absurd

# MODERN Drunkard MAGAZINE

Sept/Oct 2005

The Rise  
of The Drys

The Heroines  
of Hooching

Drinking with  
the Dictators

Mullocked in  
Minneapolis

The Politics of  
Drinking and Driving

SHOOT  
FIRST

ASK WHO'S  
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**.45 Dangerous Minds  
– eds. Steven Blush &  
George Petros (2005)  
Creation Books**

Starting off promoting DC hardcore shows, Steven Blush grew tired of that, moved to the Lower East Side and began, sometime in 1986, to publish an uncompromising pop culture zine from his tenement apartment. Although the tear sheets would have us believe that the mag never got within “hailing distance of commercial success,” that is pure poppycock. For within a few years after maverick journalist and avant-gardist George Petros came aboard, the zine known as Seconds

The Most Intense Interviews from *SECONDS*

**.45  
DANGEROUS  
MINDS**



Edited by  
**STEVEN BLUSH & GEORGE PETROS**

slicked up, cleaned up and became the toast of the underground. That was primarily the result of pushing the review section to the background, and concentrating on interviews with the wildest, weirdest and most outrageous personalities they could find. Never condescending, always well researched and thought out, the interviewers also brought a kind of street knowledge and school-of-hard-knocks sensibility that allowed them to effectively navigate the twisted corridors of such diseased minds as little Charlie Manson, Anton LaVey and Richard Ramirez. And when more erudition was needed, as with a David Bowie or Ed Sanders or J.G. Ballard, Blush and company were able to dial it up several notches. So adept did Seconds become at the Q&A, that the magazine appended the tag line "The Art of the Interview" to the masthead. And drew little flack for it. They were that good. So no need to keep throwing out the names here, but we'd suggest you start with the touching and revealing session with the twisted soul known as Tiny Tim, jump to the Zen beat of Allen Ginsberg, then ride into hell with Racial Holy War founder George Eric Hawthorne. It will give you a good feel for the reach and aspirations which fueled this epochal publication.

## **Fallen Stars – Tragic Lives and Lost Careers – Julian Upton (2004) Headpress**

The only thing better than dished dirt on major stars is the poop let go on those aspiring to such status. There's just something so wonderfully horrid, so deliciously low, about dumping on those whose life and work is in the process of being buried. Julian Upton seems to understand this, and thus his study of the decline and vile fall of twenty-one British film and television stars has him wielding a sledgehammer o'er the now-rotting heads of the, for the most part, small and relatively insignificant. Peter Sellers makes an appearance but you can ignore this. Genius being equal parts madness and despair holds little surprises for us. For questionable talents like Diana Dors, Oliver Reed and Benny Hill, however, there is a fascination with the circumstances and idiot luck that allotted for success, and the foolishness and inherent character flaws that brought them down. Surely,

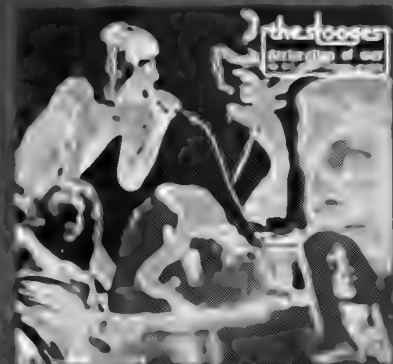
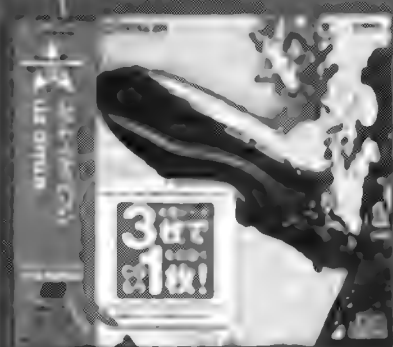
it had something to do with the burgeoning, then overwhelming realization of flying far too close to the sun? Booze, betrayal, and bad choices and worse luck are all put into play. The reader, toddling off to bed, tells himself, "What matter, the scum also rises. Talent will out and that's the reason Marlon Brando gets the big bucks, despite being two hundred pounds out of shape and clearly deranged."

## **Sellelevision – Augusten Burroughs (2000) Picador**

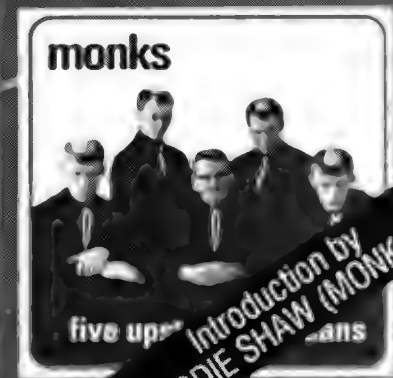
With the ascent of *Running With Scissors*, Burroughs' bilious bildungsroman to cult status - Hollywood movie, critically lauded rock band, web sites - we would be criminally remiss in failing to note that this mordant take on American cupidity, Republican values and obsession with celebrity, may be the better read. It all begins when Max Andrews, a gay host on Sellelevision, a home shopping network, accidentally exposes himself on Slumber Party Sundown. Adding insult to injury, the flash occurs during the Toys for Tots segment, a feature on the program that attracts tens of thousands of prepubescent children. And their mothers. Within hours, Peggy Jean Smythe, an Anita Bryant manque and rising star on the network begins receiving nasty e-mails about her hairy ear lobes. Then her mustache. Then her knuckles and her arms. Clearly, despite her marvelous looks, she is a monster. Peggy begins popping pills and drinking heavily, in the process neglecting her three dysfunctional children and failing to notice her husband's growing interest in the lithe sixteen year old next door. Who on earth is sending these e-mails? Is it Max, whose growing frustration at his inability to find work thanks to his inadvertent gaffe, is driving him round the bend? Is it Leigh, another beautiful Sellelevision host, who is in danger of losing airtime to Leigh, and whose anxieties are being compounded by an ineffectual affair with Howard Toast, Sellelevision chief executive? And what about Bebe, the major star in the channel's firmament, who is doing as much buying "from" her employers as she is selling? So buy this one, kids, as it's two, two books in one: savage Swifteen satire on contemporary American mores and a sexy send-up of saccharine soap operas.

# Lovers & Buggers & Thieves

Garage Rock  
Monster Rock  
Psychedelic Rock  
Progressive Rock  
Folk Rock



Edited by Martin Jones



Introduction by  
EDDIE SHAW (MONKS)



## **Lovers Buggers & Thieves – ed. Martin Jones (2005) Headpress**

Think of this as the coolest rock and roll mag on the market, as it has, as its sole concern, the hippest, wiggliest, most outre sounds what was ever laid on the planet. That's right, the stuff of cults and drunken late night musings. So even when we're talking Beatles, we're talking a comprehensive guide to Lennon & Co.'s bootlegs and "outfaces." When we're discussing Led Zep, it's only to show just how lousy they were in comparison to Iron Butterfly whom, the writers admit, were pretty lousy themselves. Garage, progressive, psychedelic, folk and even "monster" gets play. The emphasis, as Michael Lucas of the late, lamented Phantom Surfers notes, is on "exhilaration, savagery, dementia, desperation, eccentricity, befuddlement and just plain chowderheadedness." Thank you, Michael, for further muddying the waters, but we told you this thing was fab, did we not? Articles on The Sonics and Manson's LIE album, the single best and most disturbing history of The Stooges ever penned. An interview with garage legends, The Monks and the single best and most disturbing history of Moby Grape's Skip Spence ever penned. Liberally sprinkled throughout are short essays on odd one shots the editors tastefully label "disturbo music." We kid a bit here, but we kid because we love this one hundred and ninety-two page bit of coolness. For its clever and effective use of the English language, the fresh insights, the clever humor and wonderful sense of the absurd allowed to play all about. Most importantly for how hot and bothered it made us about records and subjects to which we would ordinarily never give a second thought. Either for being overly familiar with the subject as with The aforementioned Stooges, or because we had long ago tossed the topic - 70s Bootleg Scene, Australian Psych - into the pop culture dustbin.

## **Imperial Ambitions: Conversations On The Post-9/11 World – Noam Chomsky (2005) Metropolitan Books**

The rest of the world seems to understand what's happening here – vanishing civil

liberties, fascism ascendant, the systematic impoverishment of the middle and lower classes, the take-over of the media by corporations - why can't the citizens of the United States see what everyone else does? Noam Chomsky explains this phenomeon and plenty more besides, in this series of far ranging interviews on the state of the world today.

Most of this is centered on what's happening in the land of the free and the home of the brave, and, although the more educated among us may have some inkling that something "not good" is indeed happening, we really don't have a clue as to what it is. Do we, Mr. and Ms. Jones? No, we don't, because, according to Chomsky, you and I and everyone you know have had the powers that be working overtime to turn us into "pathological monsters," caring only for ourselves, wanting little to do with our fellow citizens. So problems become that which happens to other people and so, for us, it becomes all about shopping and the pursuit of pleasure.

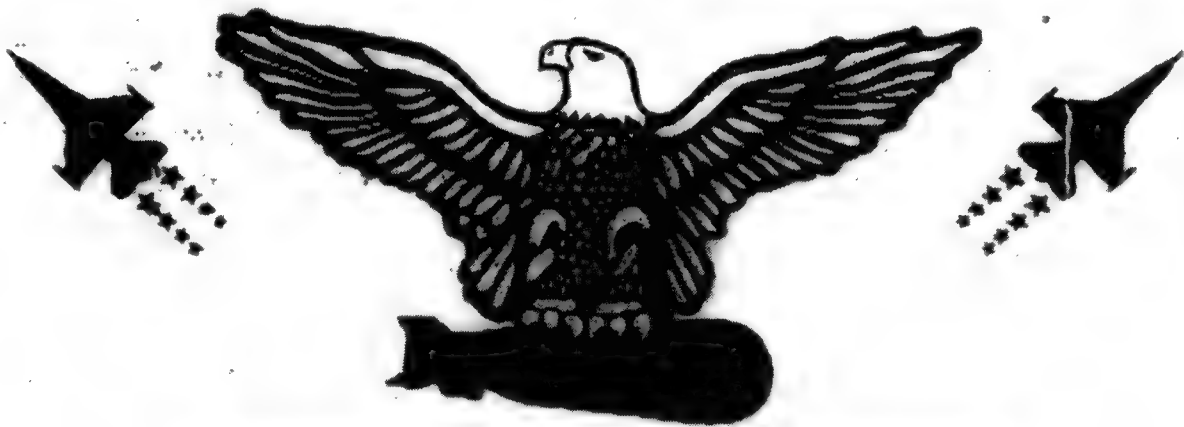
When we "get" to this state, we're perfectly content to let our leaders tell us what's going on. And what's good for us and what we should be doing. Like ignoring the fact that we're being bled dry while the rich are getting richer, and that everyone on the globe detests us because we're invading countries posing absolutely no threat to us, so that a few multinational corporations can increase their profits a thousand fold.

Some of us are not really buying this. That's why books like Chomsky's get published. To ask the questions we know we should be asking ourselves, but just can't seem to. We don't have the words, Chomsky does, he's a linguist, a brilliant linguist. And he tells us what he knows to be true by taking seemingly simple terms like "democracy" and "freedom," and showing how they've been twisted and perverted so that our very notion of reality becomes affected. It's kind of a game, and once you learn the rules and see how the bad guys work it, you can start to train yourself to ask the "obvious questions" that Chomsky feels are essential to protecting yourself from manipulation and control. So for example, with Bush's future actions, you merely have to ask whether the policy will benefit the

THE AMERICAN EMPIRE PROJECT

# NOAM CHOMSKY

AUTHOR OF HEGEMONY OR SURVIVAL



**IMPERIAL AMBITIONS**

**CONVERSATIONS ON THE  
POST-9/11 WORLD**

**INTERVIEWS WITH DAVID BARSAMIAN**

rich or the general population, and there you are. Or if you're wondering if the people of Iraq feel they have been "liberated," here's an idea: Why don't we ask them instead of having the newspapers – owned by the very corporate interests – do so?

Adam Smith believed that "sympathy" was the core human value and that society should be so constructed so that this natural impulse might be satisfied. Bush and his New World Order are acting from the opposite impulse. That's what New Orleans and Social Security reform were all about: cupidity and hatefulness. That's evil. In any language.

## **THROUGH THE HABITRAILS - Jeff Nicholson (1996) Colonia**

This little tome has long since been buried by the general short term memories of both comic audiences and general pop culture overkill. Finding it as a Tower close-out sale was one of the highpoints of my long career in chain store cut out bin dumpster diving. I've never seen the rituals of a stagnant hand to mouth existence rendered this accurate and chillingly desperate. The title *Through The Habitrails* exudes the same ominous, mounting frustration of its nameless anti-hero, whose thankless and endless work at a graphic design office sends him spiraling into a frightening series of emotional disasters and eventually, insanity. The stark art and writing of Jeff Nicholson is truly a miracle to behold. The man's work SCREAMS at you in a deafening silence.

Aside from being one of the creepiest comics on record, it's also one of the most poignant. Our Salaryman drags himself from hangover to heartbreak, from work to sleep and back all over again, and the storytelling conveys his condition with both sensitivity and a menacing schizophrenic bent. The blunt symbolism (a literal habitrail running through the workplace; spigots installed on the worker's backs for routine "tapping" by the management; the phantasmagoric, malevolent "gerbil king" lurking in corners) works as well as any absurdist metaphor I've seen since Romero's "zombie consumers" in *Dawn Of The Dead*.

Cat killing, bitter gossip, alcoholism, aural and visual hallucination, paranoia, and self hatred form a web of bullshit job-induced misery only suicide would seem to unravel. If you work a job you hate...hell, if you've ever suffered for peanuts doing anything you'd rather you didn't have to, you'll feel every eerie panel, every sadistic touch of Nicholson's nightmare roll over your psyche like a tragic funeral dirge. Sinking even deeper into the world of corporate oppression than even *Fight Club* could manage, *Through The Habitrails* is an esoterically structured masterpiece with more exhibitionist authenticity per page than any other graphic artwork I can name. It is a true work of depression and anxiety, of torpor and spiritual malaise. A requiem for the human soul, and in this tale, that soul is obviously Nicholson's.

*Through The Habitrails* made me sad to be an American; it gave me goosebumps that could have been mistaken for mosquito bites. Buy it used on eBay or Amazon if you have any faith in Mr. Bad Vibes whatsoever. – Gene Gregorits

## **WHITE TRASH LIKE ME – Dale Young (2003) B&D Publishing**

"I told the bitch to go to sleep, after regrettably nailing her. She ordered me to fuck her again. I refused and told her to go to sleep or else I was going to drop her off back with that faggot Mace. She began to cry. I told her to cry all she wants because she's had my dick once and that was all she was going to get. Then she starts asking me if I find her unattractive. I told her she wasn't unattractive but I was tired and she was talkin too fuckin much. (Actually, she was all of the sudden extremely unattractive to me, but I didn't want to hurt her feelings.) Then, she asks me if she can live here for two weeks until she goes in the service. In order to shut her the fuck up, I said it was okay. The nasty bitch finally fell asleep, and when she did I got up and jacked off in her hair, heh, heh, heh."

Some things you oughta know about Dale Young: he's tough. Scrappy and long, standing nearly seven feet tall. He's a sweetheart. He writes like he talks, he writes about being a goofy alcoholic sex fiend and he lives like an animal.

Oh yeah-he farts a lot, and laughs easy at the horror of it all.

"She was eating her eggs and drinking her milk when I looked up at her from my own eggs. She smiled at me with a cute little milk mustache. I smiled back. She was just like a little girl in a woman's body. I felt like an older brother to her, but an older brother who wants to fuck his little sister."

I drank with Dale Young on several occasions, usually alienating everyone in the room but Dale Young. When he left Hollywood and moved back to the Motor City, I had one more reason to leave Hollywood too. He was one of the only real people I met in that rotten sewer, and his antics were truly an awesome sight to behold. Carousing and getting busted up fairly often, crashing his ten speed on beer runs, riding thirty miles each way to work, getting fired, 86'd, pissed off and horny, avoiding his landlord, going to AA drunk, showing me his acceptance letter from the William Morris agency, telling me the funniest stories I've ever heard in my life, and screaming.

"THE POWER OF CHRIST COMPELS YOU!", he roared, anointing anyone in a twenty foot radius with warm Coors Original, oblivious to the tears of the woman behind him.

White Trash Like Me reads like a 24 hour drinking session with the writer, on a good night when you're in the mood to hear about indecent exposure, violence, hitting bottom, and other skid row sideshow diversions. Written in and about Michigan, Dale's birthplace and home, the novel has no pacing and a threadbare structure. It doesn't need them, because there's no telling what the crazy bastard is going to say next (although odds are, it will involve pussy, beer, urine, shit, snot, pus, earwax, whiskey, blood, police, and pussy) and the book is incredibly funny.

That said, White Trash Like Me is factual, and thus horrific, too. Dale Young has a keen eye for detail, and he's honest to a fault. There are things in this book even yours truly doesn't, and wouldn't, have the balls to admit. By the end of White Trash, after wading shoulder-deep through Young's hazardous life and times, you

kinda like the main character, Bruce. And you're also very, very happy to not be him. Unless you're stupid, like me, because White Trash Like Me made your reviewer strangely jealous of Mr. Young.

Dale Young's debut novel is crude, repulsive, endlessly bleak. Sloppily written. Infantile. Honest and mean and so richly scatological that I haven't had a shit in six months without laughing until my face hurt. White Trash Like Me belongs next to every Brutarian reader's toilet.

(Dale, I'm still really sorry about breaking your cabinets, getting broken glass in your swimming pool, jumping up and down on you while you tried to sleep it off. I'm especially sorry about fucking up your bushes. I'm obviously trying to sell this fuckin book of yours, so maybe you oughta get in touch. I'm sold out.) - Gene Gregorits





**M**on sembable! Mon hypocrite lecteur! Bemoaning Ozzy absenting himself while you played the abject fool! Forgive him as he forgives you, as we both did not know what we done did! The Gods of political correctness did sayeth unto us both that it was not meet to continue with encomiums to promiscuity and liberality and drunkenness, did they not? Well, that absence did nothing for sales. Women continued to boycott the magazine and men, in obeisance to their women said unto Brutarian, "We love you, but we loveth the occasional bland fucking more. Despite the refusal to acknowledge the fetish and the toy purchase and the need for role playing and inventiveness in general . . ."

Yes, my brothers, truly a sad state of sexual affairs. Thus, Mr. Fide gathers ye to him and sayeth unto: GO FUCK YOURSELVES. Henceforth, this column and Brutarian's philosophy will be primarily about amusing

ourselves. Even unto the point of death and bankruptcy. No we are not embracing the dark side. Mormons and Republicans subscriptions will continue to be honored.

So be it. In any case, Oz has been invited back, and with him comes the six pack review system. Which, in his not-so-humble- opinion, needs restoring. As zines across the world, Film Threat included although now something other, have purloined and claimed as their own brilliant invention.

Right! Oz is babbling and you're asking what the hell he's talking about. Alright, here goes: You'll notice after reading the reviews, that a number of beer cans appear. Naturally, you ask yourself the question: What does this mean? Or maybe: Who cares, as these critical pieces are so badly written I'm thinking of writing an e-mail to this moron telling him to shove them all up his ass!

A great point, as Oz is no Agee. Or even Michael Weldon (and don't stop buying Psychotronic, as it's still the last word on film on the margins). Still, Oz feels he should explain. The rating system is based on the notion that a truly memorable exploitation film will have the average alcoholic drinking a six pack within the standard ninety-minute running time. Why? Well, to keep himself from running naked into the streets proclaiming the movie's greatness. Don't laugh, Mr. Fide has found himself in this position many many times. Fortunately, such transgressions occurred quite late at night, so no complaints were lodged. No dates were made, either, but then again, phone numbers are hard to come by when you're running naked in the streets at 3 AM.

Moronic, Ozzy agrees, nevertheless, you have to admit, it's a little more eye-catching than stars. C'mon, everyone uses fucking stars. Ok, ok, porn reviewers use dildos; still, who the hell watches porn films anymore? We have attention spans of dogs thanks to the internet and USA Today, and so no one, Oz repeats, no one, watches stroke films all the way through. We download one to five minute sequences on the net, call our favorite "fuck-buddy" (also met on the internet), and we're done.

Films of this quality take a little more time. You're not sitting there with some strange guy drinking tequila, trying to get horny and pretend you are a homosexual merely because

you haven't had a piece in a month of Sundays. No, you're earnestly trying to determine whether this is worth seeing all the way to the end or switching to the pay-per-view porno channel on your satellite dish. For you, parent's basement dweller, food-stamp recipient, perennially unemployed dope smokers, this Bud's for you!

### **THE HOUSE WITH LAUGHING WINDOWS – (d) Pupi Avati/(sp) Pupi Avati et al (1976)**

Long considered a classic in its native Italy, Pupi Avati's subtle exorcise in Gothic terror finally gets a crack stateside in this lovingly and artfully remastered Image Entertainment DVD. While short on gore, and virtually devoid of nudity, Laughing Windows' masterful pacing, clever camerawork and magnificent cinematography amply rewards the patient viewer.

Remember though, Patience is the name of the game here, as Avati's story of an art restorer's attempts to discover a town's deadly secret takes its time getting down to things. Which is fine, as Windows opens with the incredibly disturbing image of a naked man, chained to a ceiling, being slowly slashed to death while a madman chants Baudelairean poetry. Thereafter, you're asked to get comfy and settle down with an intriguing mystery, one which turns out to be a conundrum wrapped in an enigma, itself bound to a dark dark secret. At the center, our art restorer resides, Stefano, hired to clean and touch-up a gruesome fresco of the martyrdom of Saint Sebastian in a decrepit church in a once thriving resort town. The painting is the work of an insane local named Legnani, a recluse lovingly saddled with the moniker, "The Painter of Agony," due to his penchant for sketching terminal cases. One morning – or was it evening, no one really remembers – Legnani vanished, never to be seen again. Not even the two sisters with whom he lived knew of his whereabouts. And that was, simply that. Nobody ever heard from the mad, tortured artist

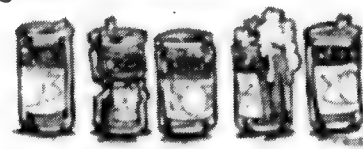
again. Intrigued by the unexplained vanishing, Stefano seeks to learn more about Legnani, but the villagers, a rather eccentric bunch to say the least, are not particularly forthcoming.

Now here's where things begin to get interesting and it all has something to do with the characters, the faces that we meet. That is to say, our villagers who, while not fully realized, are nevertheless artfully drawn, each character possessing something in their look or manner that makes them memorable. And highly suspect. Moreover, all harbor information concerning the disappeared Legnani. Terribly disturbing information which has Stefano beginning to question not only what "happened" to Legnani but perhaps more importantly, just what the hell "was" Legnani.

Stefano pursues the clues while continuing to work on the restoration of the fresco. Warned off the work by a mysterious caller, Stefano shrugs it off and, with his new girlfriend, a beautiful young teacher named Francesca, moves into an old villa on the outskirts of town. The villa is owned by a creepy old dame attended by an even creepier mental defective. There things get mysteriouser and mysteriouser. The creepy phone calls continue, a tape recording of the weird poetic chanting heard at the beginning of the flick turns up in Stefano and Francesca's bedroom, and strange noises drift down from the upstairs. Then, a friend of Stefano's, also working on the mystery of "who or what" is Legnani, turns up dead from a fall from his hotel window. Suicide or murder? The man had just recovered from a mental breakdown but Stefano, on his way to meet the man, sees a shadow in the third story window just before the dive.

Director and scenarist Avati, saves all the shocks for the final reel, yet manages to invest the proceedings with a lovely air of foreboding. Watch the fog slowly creeping on little cat's feet into the piazza, and try to resist a shudder. That disorientation you feel as Stefano works his way up the stairway to what used to be the atelier? That's the camera being gently shaken. The startling sounds of boots on tile, metal on bone? It's Avati eschewing music for natural effects. Add to this a painterly eye for detail, detail both banal and macabre, a delicious sense of mordant humor, as

well as a delight for confusion worse confounded, and you've got a movie that can hold its own with the best of Fulci and Argento.



## **DELIRIUM - (d)/(sp) Renato Polselli (1972)**

The hitherto unavailable European cut of this beastly giallo, now making its stateside debut thanks to the good folks at Anchor Bay Video, should gladden the bloody hearts of even the most jaded and cynical of gorehounds. Delirium's release is especially welcome news for trashfiends, like Ozzy, who are only familiar with the domestic print, which tacked on a ridiculous prologue centering the killer's psychosis in his traumatic battlefield experiences in Vietnam. Thankfully, said prologue has been excised (although the DVD does offer the American version as a bonus), leaving us with a violent, erotically charged, dreamy narrative. Dreamy is the operative term, as things tend to get a bit muddled at times; still, what matter that when the dream is so disquieting and arresting.

At the heart of the matter, is Dr. Herbert Lyutak (Mickey Hargitay aka Mr. Jayne Mansfield), a crazed psychiatrist who gets his rocks off by strangling beautiful young women and defiling their corpses. How this animal keeps his license is beyond Oz; maybe in Italy mental illness is a prerequisite for gaining a psychiatric license. Don't laugh, didn't the Eye-Ties just elect a former Nazi to the Popedom? If that ain't crazy, Mr. Fide don't know what is . . .

Anyway, here's where it gets real real interesting. The crazed doc is married to a luscious thing (Rita Calderoni of The Reincarnation of Isabel) who is just as nutty as he is. Oh yes she is: she knows Hargitay's the killer and it really sends her, has her more in love with him than ever. So much so that Rita gets naked constantly in front of the doc begging him to "do whatever you want to me." Which is not what you and I would do to poor Rita, as Hargitay's idea of foreplay has more to do with the practices of Torquemada than Casanova. Yet despite being scared and lashed and strangled,

raving Rita comes back for more. Strange, because Rita's actually a nymphomaniac lesbian in the midst of affairs with both her hot brunette live-in maid and her zaftig blond niece.

See, Ozzy told you she was nuttier than Hargitay. And I'm leaving out the medieval-lesbian dream sequences, wherein a chained-at-the-neck Hargitay is forced to watch while Rita has her way with the two aforementioned women.

So what else is there? Well, we have lots of murders, inventively perpetrated, and after the first one, allowing the viewer to watch Hargitay commit the crime, the remainder take place through the perp's eyes. Thus, an element of mystery is interjected as to whether our brain-damaged Doc is murdering all the luscious ladies. Or whether it is someone else. Or whether the Doc is imagining it all. Or whether you have had one too many beers, and have lost track of things.

To keep us from taking things too seriously, we are graced with Alphonse and Gaston police inspectors. These guys give new meaning to the word "languid" as they consistently take their sweet time getting to the scene of the crime. Even if the crime is still in progress. Hey, you don't want to get there too early. That could be dangerous!

And how is it that Hargitay knows so much about the killer that he can even predict where and when the killings are going to take place? Oz doesn't know about you, but that spells G-U-I-L-T-Y to him. Maybe the word doesn't exist in Italian.

Delirium's a mess; nevertheless, it's an entertaining mess, filled with heartfelt perversion, genuinely erotic sequences, a few interesting cinematic tricks and much overheated acting. It's one long phantasm with an uneasy mixture of primitive humor and depravity at once unsettling, yet remarkably comforting in a strange, almost indescribable way.



## VENUS IN FURS - (d) Jess Franco/ (sp) Jess Franco et al (1969)

Here's the Jess Franco film for those of you vowing never to see another Franco flick, after watching . . . Well, after watching almost anything Jess has ever made. Reportedly a great favorite Of Orson Welles', Venus In Furs, although having little to do with the Sader-Masoch novella of the same name, is a delightfully surreal story of obsession, revenge, infidelity and murder.

James Darren channels the langorous beat and look of Chet Baker in the role of jazz trumpeter Jimmy Logan, haunted by the spirit of a dead woman (Maria Rohm) with whom he was once in love. Only from afar, though, as the woman, whose name was Wanda Reed, moved with the rich glitterati, and he, Jimmy, was a mere hireling having to content himself with watching Wanda from the bandstand.

Now she's dead, washed up on a beach in Istanbul. Rolling in apparently just for Jimmy - "She was still beautiful, even though dead.." On all the beaches in all the world, why did she have to pick this one? Play it, Jimmy. Play it again.

Must have been those crazy games Wanda was making with the jaded sophistos in the wine cellar. There was Olga, a lithe lesbian photog, Herr Kapp, a badly ageing art dealer (Dennis Price), and Turkish playboy Ahmed (Klaus Kinski). And a whip and a long sharp knife. They didn't spot Jimmy lurking in the shadows. He should've stayed. He might have been able to save Wanda. Jimmy couldn't handle it; slipped away in disgust. "Man, it was a wild scene! But if they wanted to go that route, it was their bag . . ."

So Wanda's washed up on the beach and Jimmy's totally wiggled out. Can't even find his way to hefting his axe. Kind of like writer's block. Jimmy decamps to Rio. Finds a new lover in statuesque Rita (Barbar McNair), a nightclub singer. She helps Jimmy get his groove back. That's when Wanda decides to make the scene. Or is it Wanda? It looks like her, but her hair is now cropped short, and it's red, not blonde. And Wanda has this quiet, melancholy air about her. She doesn't walk so much as drift.



# High TENSION

"IT WILL SCARE THE LIVING HELL OUT OF YOU"

By David Karger

When it comes to horror, there's nothing more terrifying than a movie that makes you feel like you're in the room with the monster. That's why the new season of horror is so exciting. It's a time when the genre is finally getting the respect it deserves. And it's a time when the genre is finally getting the attention it deserves. It's a time when the genre is finally getting the respect it deserves. And it's a time when the genre is finally getting the attention it deserves.

SUMMER 2005

<http://high-tension.com>

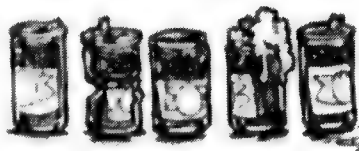
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I-LOVE  
Hearts

Jimmy's mesmerized and, even though he's living with Rita, he starts carrying on with Wanda. It doesn't seem real to him. He asks himself, "Am I dead?" and "Is Wanda dead?"

The viewer knows, because unbeknownst to Jimmy, Wanda hasn't just come back for him. Herr Kapp and Olga have jetted down to Rio for carnival. Wanda wants payback, and she gets it in two sharply realized erotic dream sequences.

In fact, once Jimmy hits Rio, the whole film becomes one long uninterrupted homage to Thanatos and Nepenthe. The camera swirls and diffidently moves about, colors bleed and then are blanched. Romantic images of the beach and sunsets on the water vie for our attention with the spastic, maddened dancers at carnival. There's music stirring, and playing with, our emotions: Jimmy's bop, (courtesy of Mike Hugg and Manfred Mann), the eerie leit motif of Wanda's announcing impending doom, unbearably kitschy lounge soundings. Fading in and out, in and out without rhyme or reason. We listen and watch. And wait. And wonder.



## **HIGH TENSION – (d) Alexandre Aja (sp) Alexandre Aja & Gregory Levasseur (2003)**

Mr. Fide thought he'd seen it all after watching a President of the United States invade a country for absolutely no reason, until he chanced upon this. That's right, a slasher film made in French by French people. You can tell it's French because the people in it talk like Brigitte Bardot and Yves Montand. Enough of that, and hear me now and know that, despite its arty camerawork and neurasthenic editing, and painterly use of color, this is one shocking mother of a film.

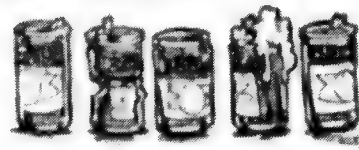
Like all the best slasher flicks – that's maybe three or four in the entire history of the genre – High Tension eschews story for thrills and bloody chills. There's a set-up- two hot young gals take a weekend off at a remote farm housed owned by one of the gal's parents and are abruptly set

upon by an obese psychopathic truck driver – and from there we go from tense sequence to tense sequence. With our only relief coming from scenes of appalling carnage. That's right, this is a work in which the murders – gruesome and sanguinary as they are – are actually designed as moments of quiet in an otherwise terrifying mise en scene. Impossible, Oz knows, so start drinking as the titles are introduced and do not, Mr. Fide, repeats, do not stop. You have been warned.

Ya know, with High Tension, it's almost as if the French looked upon this most despised of genres and said to themselves, "Mon Dieu, ze problems with the Anglais' approach iz wid de timidity. Tu desire le slash? Oui will make with le slash! Et le head-splitting, et throat cutting, et le axe to ze chest, etc."

Toward this end, director Aja and his co-scenarist push, not just the viewer's face, but the body in toto, into the bloody doings. There may be nothing new under le sol; yet not since Texas Chainsaw Massacre has Ozzy been left so "physically" exhausted by a movie. Man oh Manaschevitz, when that axe hits the chest, you'll feel the bone. Your bone.

A lot of criticism has been leveled at the twist ending, the general consensus holding that such a denouement was impossible as it contradicted what had preceeded. Relax, veteran horror fans, you'll figure things out early on, and will still have a helluva time. Pace, Roger Ebert and his epigones, we all know that if a tale is told from the point of view of an unreliable narrator, then the rules of logic no longer apply. C'est vrai? C'est vrai!



## **GIRLY aka MUMSY, NANNY, SONNY & GIRLY – (d) Freddie Frances (sp) Brian Comport & Maisie Mosco (1969)**

Let others wrestle, gamely attempting to put weighty thoughts into words. Ozzy will have none of it; thus will he forego the exercise of explaining, unearthing and otherwise explicating the sociological, mythological and psychosexual

subtexts lying so absurdly close to the surface of this 70s British black comedy. Leave all that for misguided film scholars and academic journeymen. Mr. Fide will address, instead, the less pretentious, better read and bred of those among you, i.e., the jaded aesthete, and say unto you that *Girly* is Edward Albee made alarmingly simple.

The *Girly* of the title is either a twenty-something posing as a recently teenaged girl, or a recently teenaged girl posing as a debutante. No matter, enjoy the short skirts and the constant flashing of panties sans guilt. Go on, that's what she, the delectable Vanessa Howard, is there for.

That too, is how *Girly* entices a middle-aged, penniless Lothario – after killing his rich girlfriend with the help of her demented teenage brother – into her castle in the woods. Part of a large estate in which she lives with brother and her Mumsy and Nanny.

Everyone in the castle is as crazy as a loon and no one, apparently, does anything save for eating and puttering about. Nice work if you can get it, but where is the money coming from? Ah, these are the aristocracy. The moneyed classes and so, are we about to embark on a social satire à la *The Ruling Class*?

Not on your life! This is a movie directed by Freddie Frances of Hammer Horror fame, so get set for weirdness and horror. In the form of games, children's games – London Bridge, Ring Around the Rosey – that become, at a moment's notice, decidedly deadly. Back to our badly aging roue, blotto the night his mistress and keeper was murdered by the kids (she was pushed off a slide in a public park). He's been hoodwinked into believing he's responsible, but he's not really in such a hurry to establish his innocence, as *Girly* is bending and bouncing and bobbing all over the place in those micro-mini schoolgirl outfits of hers. Still, Mumsy and Nanny and Sonny worry a bit, so they keep the corpse of the mistress popping up in all manner of unlikely places, just to remind their guest that he had better mind his p's and q's.

There's a weakness at the heart of this crazy clan, however, and that's sex. The need for it. The constant need for it. *Girly's* just coming into her own. Mumsy is post menopausal and so freed

from the constraints of her monthlies. Nanny is menopausal, and with those hot flashes, she is undoubtedly having some heated desires. Sonny is either too young or too gay or too crazy, we're never quite sure which one, but in any case, he's not too terribly pleased to be supplanted as the "man" of the house.

That leaves our aging rake, and it turns out he's no fool. He can see what's what, and so he decides to exploit the situation for all its worth, playing the woman against one another. His weapon. The only tool in his employ, if you know what I mean, and I think you do. Soon, the prisoner becomes the jailer, no longer playing the clan's games but having them play his. There is still the problem of Sonny, however.

*Girly*, Mumsy, Sonny & Nanny never really makes up its mind whether it wants to be the blackest of comedies, social satire or a shocking chiller, and so ends up failing on all counts. Nevertheless, it is never less than engaging and, almost needless to say, incredibly sleazy. Director Frances and company raise a number of interesting questions about sexuality, societal mores, traditional family values, class, love and honor and so on, but, in the end, don't bother to answer them. Or even address some of them as the film progresses. The issue is raised, then often as not, dropped. Mr. Fide is betting that Mr. Frances, like Ozzy, had difficulty concentrating what with *Girly's* constant cheekiness.



## **MADHOUSE – (d) William Butler (sp) William Butler, Aaron Strongoni (2004)**

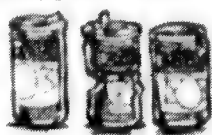
If you think about it, the crazyhouse flick is the easiest type to assay in the horror genre. Get yourself a creepy setting, people it with characters with annoying psychoses, some beautiful gals suffering from terminal nymphomania, dim the lights, and off you go. You don't even need a script if you've got a decent special effects guy with some inventive ideas of how to kill people. And if somehow, somehow, you manage to convince





Madhouse is not a brilliant picture, but it possesses all of the above, including a fairly entertaining screenplay and clever cinematography to boot – superimposed ghosts leaping and lurching out of nowhere, painterly use of colors, clever jumpcuts, adroit use of shadow and ambient light. There's a beautiful female lead itching to get out of her clothes, some incredibly freaky looking nutjobs in the dank and dirty hopeless ward, and one homicide in particular that would have Dario Argento standing and applauding.

So why isn't Madhouse a must see? Well, the movie is poorly structured and the pacing is rather slow. The framing device is more confusing than intriguing, and it takes almost two reels before things start to get even a wee bit interesting. Moreover the leads – Joshua Leonard (Blair Witch), Lance Henriksen, Jordan Ladd (Cabin Fever) – while acquitting themselves well, are just too blanched out as characters for the viewer to really care about them one way or the other. Guys and gals, I know this is a movie centered in an insane asylum, but that doesn't mean you have to shuffle about like zombies. One of you should give us something to hate. Or to love. Ok, Jordan, you have a body made for sin, but you don't even take off your shirt until the movie is almost over. For that you deserve the axe. Which she gets. In the nastiest place imaginable. But again, you're not gonna really give a tinker's damn.



**LIPSTICK AND DYNAMITE – (d)/(sp)**  
**Ruth Leitman (2004)**

If your idea of a good time is watching strapping babes in bathing suits slap each other around, then you're sure to enjoy this documentary about the grand old days of female wrestling. That's right, the days when women dressed like ladies outside the ring and then put on tight onepieces and turned into total psychos.

In making the film, director Leitman claimed she wanted to present these women as feminist pioneers, and treat them with the dignity and respect they deserve, but it's apparent that she quickly jettisoned that idea when she realized how boring that would be. So instead, we get grainy footage of hot looking babes punching and dropkicking the bejesus out of each other, and interviews with the grande dames bitching about the promoters and the unholy, unsportswomanlike tactics of their opponents. The Fabulous Moolah, who became the biggest women's wrasslin' agent sometime around the end of the 50s, takes a lot of low blows from her studly sisters here, but she gives as good as she gets. Still, it's difficult to take her defense about not exploiting her charges seriously when she has an intellectually-impaired dwarf aka Diamond Lil in obvious bondage as a domestic and cook. And let's not even talk about her lesbian partnership with the badly aging Mae Young. Ewwwwwwwwwwwwww!

Although Oz could have done with a lot less of the pathologically self-promoting Moolah – Hey! There's a reason she's still on top at the age of 134. – this is an almost seamless documentary, effectively mixing history, critical appraisal, archival footage, soap opera and behind the scenes gossip. Leitman has an eye for the telling detail, and knows when to cut away from her talking heads when things get a little much too much. She also has a great ear, too; the soundtrack is stuffed full of all manner of rockabilly, twang and vintage country, a lot of it courtesy of Neko Case and Los Straitjackets. Personally, Ozzy would like to give a shout to the still gorgeous and lithesome Ella Waldek or Penny Banner. Honey, I don't care how old you are, you're hotter than Georgia asphalt and Mr. Fide would walk five hundred miles just to see you in the altogether!



**TENEMENT – (d) Roberta Findlay (sp)  
Joel Bender & Rick Marx (1985)**

Another lost exploitation film from the 70s but, pace

trash fiend aficionados who have been singing its praises for months now on the internet, this is one piece of garbage that should have stayed buried in the New Jersey landfill from which it was unearthed. Sure, it was made by Grade Z auteur Roberta Findley. But she did her best work with her husband Michael. Sure, the *Flesh Trilogy* was fab. And those porn films she did under the nom de plume Anna Riva can't be beat for pure sleaziness. Michael was alive then, however, and Anna/Roberta was primarily working with her hubby as a cinematographer. After Michael bought the farm when his helicopter crashed into the Pan Am building in 1977, Roberta never made a film that came close to matching the couple's efforts.

OK, maybe she did, Ozzy can't claim to have seen everything Roberta made after her husband's untimely demise; nevertheless, he's seen enough of them – *Prime Evil*, *Lurkers* – to feel safe in telling you it's a safe bet to say they all suck. And that includes this rip-off of John Carpenter's *Assault on Precinct 13*, made almost a decade earlier.

It appears next to impossible to botch a premise as simple as the ole keep the bad guys from getting into the house thing – here it's a decaying South Bronx tenement set upon by a psychopathic gang - but Roberta manages to do it. And, in rather spectacular fashion, Oz must add. There's simply no suspense in any of this. Ms Findlay lets you see her punches coming from a mile away, and then pulls them just as they land. Moreover, her cast of characters only compounds Roberta's apparent inability or unwillingness to get involved. Her innocents are pathetic caricatures, e.g. feisty elderly Jewess, loutish pockmarked landlord, tender-but-tough ghetto mama, stoic black warrior, ineffectual white junkie, and her toughs, despite the rapings and stabbings and guttings, are about as menacing as the JDs on *Welcome Back Kotter*. Look, it's obvious all involved here were rank amateurs; still, was it necessary for the entire cast and crew to get totally wasted before each day's shoot? At times, it looks as if we're watching an elementary school version of *Night of the Living Dead*.

Would that you could laugh at the ineptitude. Good luck with that. You want to chuckle when a seeing-eye dog gets stabbed or a women is raped with a broomstick or children are terrorized? You go right ahead. But ask yourself this, while you're

laughing. Perhaps this sensibility is the reason you don't have a girl, and you're still living in the basement of your parent's house.



## **CUBE ZERO – (d/sp) Ernie Barbarash (2004)**

Prequel of sorts, finds an interesting cast of brain-chip implanted misfits, along with the requisite blonde babe, being tracked from the outside by an insidious military police organization. So along with the suspense involved in watching our prisoners hit each new room and wondering whether its checkmate for them – most of the rooms are booby-trapped – we are allowed to ask just what the hell is going on here? In the first film, that question was more existential; we were forced to realize early on that the cube was more of a metaphor for the meaning, or lack, of existence. Hammered home wonderfully by revealing at film's end, that the project was a government-financed boondoggle, with its civilian makers designing the hare-brained scheme of human sacrifice of society's marginals as scientific experiments to cover both their and the ruling-classes' asses.

With *Cube Zero*, we're not only wandering down that dark, cheerless path of Sartre. Oh no, the filmmakers have made the decision to kick it up a notch, by raising unanswerable sociological, political and theological questions as well. Which flow rather naturally from the narrative, thank whomever, with none of such weighty conundrums as *Whether God in a totalitarian state?* or *Is honor meaningless in a programmed environment?* Appearing the least bit gratuitous. The horrific and gory fates suffered by many of the prisoners, certainly are Barbarash & Cos.' gift to the gorehound. Still, what matter that? Such gruesome bits of business are but the work of a moment, and the viewer will be far too dazzled by the retro futuristic sets and weighty philosophical and metaphysical questions winging at him at the speed of light to protest too terribly much. The acting too, is damn fine for a straight-to-video production, with Michael Riley as the effete,

bejeweled-eyed, crippled Mr. Jax, chewing the scenery as if it's the last movie he or anybody else is ever going to make. Sadly, there is an almost total absence of nudity, which makes little sense in a film in which humans are viewed as less than animals and the female lead is so buff and polished SHE teases the average male beyond himself.



## **LOST & FOUND VIDEO NIGHT VOL 5— (eds) 5 Minutes to Live & Chunklet Magazine**

We know all about F Minutes to Live, the wonderful New Jersey video company specializing in grindhouse obscurities; Chunklet we know little about. Must be a really hip zine if their participation in this fitfully amusing video clip comp series is any indication. The overriding theme for this edition appears to be contempt. We're given

the "world's worst comedian" (he is), interviews with brain-damaged twins, selections from Bollywood musicals, Kiss-imitator testimonials and that famous altered Just-Say-No public service announcement from those wacky, star-gazing Reagans. Celebrity misfires are noticeably absent in this edition, but we do get Rowdy Roddy Piper in partial blackface doing racist shtick and Pat Boone losing his hairpiece (guess he doesn't drink from the same fountain as Dick Clark) on a Nashville chat show. Vintage commercials bring back memories of horrible times, but to keep you from blowing your head off in despair over man's essential imbecility, we're given vintage musical clips (there's also a number of inane musical clips) from the likes of Roland Kirk, Leslie Gore, Moulty and the Barbarians and ladies and gentlemen, The Rolling Stones. Performing their first hit single, and one written and gifted to them by Paul McCartney and John Lennon, "I Want To Be Your Man." Wonder how these guys got the rights to that vintage footage, tee hee!



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